

ARGOSY

APRIL
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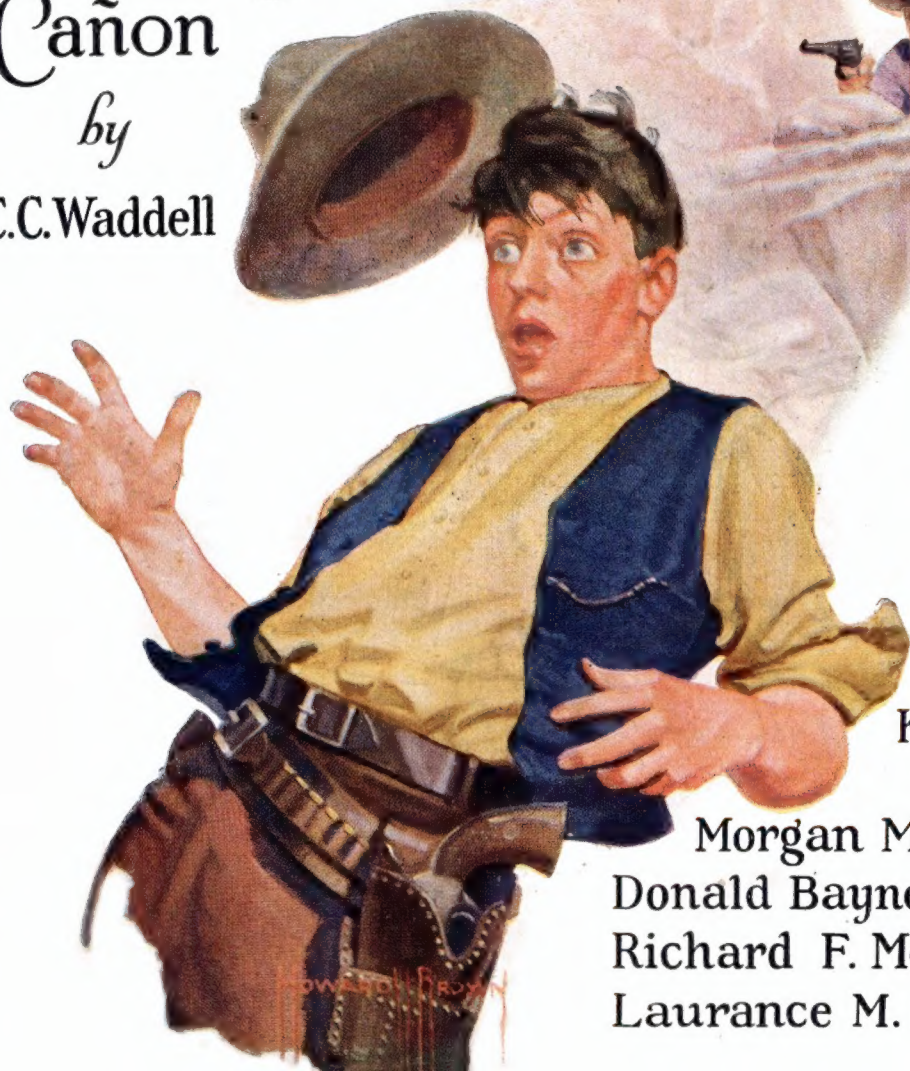
ALL-STORY
WEEKLY

PRICE
10¢

Damming Hairpin Cañon

by

C.C. Waddell



*Also
Stories
by*

Kenneth
Perkins

Morgan Mansfield

Donald Bayne Hobart

Richard F. Merrifield

Laurance M. Hare

Missing Page

Inside front cover

Carlton Representatives Doubled Their Incomes in 1927

~ Company's Sales Showed 100% Gain

~ Carlton is Nationally Known

Make \$5000 in 1928 Yourself

**TIE UP
WITH A
SUCCESSFUL
COMPANY**

With The Carlton Line!

No Experience Necessary—No Investment Required—Every minute right from the start, is to be profitable to you. Part time or Full time . . . Day time or Night time . . . An opportunity wherein your success is only dependent upon your "Willingness to Try!" . . .

You progress as your company progresses. Carlton's successful sales policy has placed this organization and its representatives in a position of field leadership -- 1928 will mark the greatest year in Carlton history.



ILLUSTRATED above . . . The famous Carlton Sample Outfit—the book that is making this entire country a play-ground of Big Money Earning for Carlton Representatives . . . the records of 1927 certainly prove it!

Between its two covers . . . the nationally known Carlton Custom-Quality Line of Men's Dress, Work and Sport Shirts, Neckwear, Underwear, Pajamas—the easiest to sell Men's Wear Line in America . . . and again the records of 1927 to prove it!

Year Round Business -Ever Active Market

Through you, we go direct to the vast American market of 35 million responsive prospects—ever new . . . never exhaustible! . . .

All you have to do is show the sample book, quote the low prices and take order after order without effort.

Carlton defrays full transportation charges, collects balances due and guarantees customer satisfaction.

If you prefer, begin by devoting spare time . . . your earnings will soon justify full time to Carlton's big-money-earning proposition.

Carlton actually puts you in business for yourself—gives your ambitions full play, and makes every minute of your association profitable.

Biggest Commissions Bonuses in Addition

You are paid daily—in cash. Each sale carries biggest commissions. Simplicity of plan makes Carlton proposition easy for you to grasp—and easy for you to start right out and show surprising results.

Carlton's Bonus Plan is the most successful earnings booster in the direct selling field—payable regularly and repeatedly, in units from \$25.00 to \$300.00. Explanation of Bonus Plan as well as details on Carlton's 40% Profit Sharing Plan furnished with outfit.

Profit Sharing is paid to Carlton representatives in addition to all other sources of Carlton incomes.

Complete Outfit FREE

Put it in Your Pocket and
Put \$100 a Week in with it.

Upon receipt by us of special coupon to the right, you will be promptly furnished with complete sample outfit—the most elaborate selling kit in the field, containing hundreds of beautifully mounted, large sized swatches, of the actual merchandise. Order books, supplies and valuable selling helps included with outfit.

There is no time like "at once" when an opportunity such as this one presents itself to you. Fill in and mail the coupon—your outfit will go forward by return post—prepaid. In less than a week, you will shake hands thankfully with the hand that wrote the coupon.

**OUTFIT
FREE**

I'll supply complete selling equipment—and accept your ambition as my receipt in full!

C. E. Mandel
Pres.



**carlton
MILLS!**

114 FIFTH AVENUE

NEW YORK - N. Y.

MAIL COUPON TODAY

C. E. MANDEL, Pres. Dept. 99-J
Carlton Mills, Inc.
114 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Mandel:

Send me the Free Carlton Outfit by return mail -- prepaid. I am ready to put The Carlton Line and your Big Money Earning guarantee to a test!

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

Start your success at once-Sparetime or full time

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOLUME 194

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The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

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FRED MACISAAC

will begin, next week, another of his absorbing serials.

Our readers will find this one

RED HOT

with struggle, high hopes, days of despair, and fight,
and ever more fighting on, to win success.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W. C. 2 111 Rue Réaumur

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary
By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; in Canada, \$7.00, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances
should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

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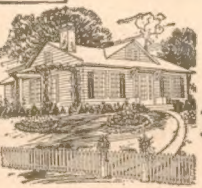
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REWARD

Find the "One" House That Is Different From the Others—It's FREE

There are 14 six-room houses pictured here. To be sure they all look alike, but examine them closely. Thirteen of them are exactly alike, but one, and only one, is different. It isn't as easy as it looks. See if you can find the different one. It is going to be given away **ABSOLUTELY FREE**.

These Clues Will Help You

At first glance all the pictures look alike, but on closer examination you will see that one, and only one, differs in some way from all the others. The difference may be in the fence, steps or even shutters. If you can find the one house that is different from all the others write me **TODAY QUICK**. You may become the owner of this house without one cent of cost to you.

Built Anywhere in U. S.

The one house that is different from all the others is going to be given away **ABSOLUTELY FREE**. It makes no difference where you live. The house can be built anywhere in the U. S., and if you do not own a lot I will even arrange to buy a lot on which to build the house. A beautiful and comfortable six-room house may be yours if you can find the different house. Certainly you have longed for the day to come when you could own your own home—this is your golden opportunity. Act **QUICK**.

You Cannot Lose Positively every one taking advantage of this opportunity is rewarded. Find the one house that is different from all the others and rush your name and address to me **TODAY**. A postal card will do, just say, "House No. — is different from all the others. Without any obligation please tell me how I can get this fine six-room house without one cent of cost to me."

LEE MORGAN, Pres.
Box 1035, Batavia, Illinois



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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rate In The Munsey Combination

Combination line rate
Munsey's Magazine . . . \$3.00
Argosy-Allstory W'ly . . .
Flynn's Weekly . . . less 2 per cent cash
Minimum space four lines. discount.

May 12th Argosy-Allstory Weekly Forms Close April 14th

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

Agents and Distributors. We pay \$85 a week from start introducing amazing new invention that converts any washbowl into a real washing machine in one minute. Quick demonstration clinches sale. Works wholly automatic, no electricity, gas engine or hand power needed. Does big family washing in 30 min. Wonderful all-year seller. Tremendous demand. No competition. Sells for only few dollars complete on a money-back guarantee. No capital or experience necessary. You make 100% profit. \$8,000 to \$10,000 a year easily. Write for **FREE** Demonstrating Outfit offer at once. Dept. 4-28, **MERLE MFG. CO.**, Aurora, Ill.

Men! Women! Take raincoat orders. Earn \$15 daily with new successful line \$5.20 leatherettes. Magnificent selection. Big commission—bonus. Outfit free. First 15 orders nets you \$26.25 profit plus free coat. Pontiac Sales, 711-W, Pontiac Bldg., Chicago.

AGENTS—BRUSH AND BROOM CATALOG with Sample Case Assortment of 50 different kinds of Brushes sent without deposit to responsible Brush Salesmen. **NATIONAL FIBRE BROOM CO.**, Dept. M, St. Louis, Mo.

MAKE \$45 TO \$100 WEEKLY—full or part time—and liberal bonus, selling **BETTER QUALITY** all-wool made-to-measure suits and overcoats. Save \$18.50 per suit. No experience necessary. Commissions paid in advance. We furnish handsome large swatch samples and complete instructions **FREE**. Write today! **W. Z. GIBSON**, 500 Throop St., Dept. R-499, Chicago.

\$45 TO \$75 WEEKLY IN SPARE TIME—NO MATTER WHAT YOU ARE NOW DOING. JUST SHOW "CHIEFTAIN" SHIRT SAMPLES AND STYLE BOOK. WRITE ORDERS. We deliver and collect. **YOUR PAY DAILY.** Complete Outfit Free. **CINCINNATI SHIRT CO.**, Shop 1767, Cincinnati, Ohio.

GUARANTEED SALARY AND COMMISSION. NEW SPECIALTY TO RETAILERS. ENORMOUS OPPORTUNITY. LIBERAL PERMANENT INCOME FROM REPEAT BUSINESS. **L. TUCKER**, BOX 1029, CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA.

AGENTS—GET VANILLA EXTRACT AT ONE CENT A BOTTLE. ALSO NEW BLACK WALNUT FLAVOR. **ADAMS FOODS**, HARVEY, ILLINOIS.

SEND NAME, ADDRESS ON POSTCARD. Free introductory copy Modern Saleslogy Magazine: 1000 money making opportunities offered by big reliable firms; no obligations. **SALES-LOGY MAGAZINE**, Desk B-238, 500 No. Dearborn, Chicago.

Don't Sell For Others. Employ Agents Yourself. Make your own products. Toilet Articles, Household Specialties, etc. 500% profit. Valuable booklet free. **NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC LABORATORIES**, 1961W Broad, Richmond, Va.

NEW HOUSEHOLD DEVICE washes—dries windows, sweeps, cleans walls, scrubs, mops. Costs less than brooms. Over half profit. **HARPERS**, 101 Third St., Fairfield Iowa.

MEN—WOMEN, \$1.80 An Hour—No Less. Large Mfg. Co., Est. 30 years, starting new Medallion department. Amazing new sales plan. First 22 agents averaged \$1.80 an hour steady. Only 1 agent wanted in locality. Your own photo free as sample. Art Medallion Co., Dept. 72, corner Campbell and Jackson, Chicago.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. WE COMPOSE MUSIC. OUR COMPOSER WROTE MANY SONG HITS. **MONARCH MUSIC COMPANY**, 236 WEST 55TH ST. (NEAR BROADWAY), DEPT. 109, NEW YORK.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

MONEY MADE IN MICHIGAN POTATOES. \$10 DOWN NOW AND EASY TERMS BUYS LAND NEAR MARKETS, Lakes, Streams. Write today. **SWIGART & CO.**, M-1276, First National Bank Building, Chicago.

DETECTIVES

DETECTIVE—EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Make secret investigations. Work home or travel. Great demand everywhere. Fascinating work. Particulars free. Write **AMERICAN DETECTIVE SYSTEM**, 2188 Broadway, New York.

HOW TO ENTERTAIN

Plays, Musical comedies and revues, minstrel music, black-face skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. **T. S. Denison & Co.**, 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 43, Chicago.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

\$10 TO \$20 DAILY EASILY EARNED SELLING SHOES FOR THE LARGEST DIRECT TO WEARER CONCERN IN THE WORLD AT SAVING OF \$2 TO \$3 PAIR. SOME GOOD PROTECTED TERRITORY STILL OPEN. **DOUBLE-WEAR SHOE CO.**, MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge \$1.50, make \$1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. **AMERICAN MONOGRAM CO.**, Dept. 64, East Orange, N. J.

Wonderful "Whisper-It" Mouthpiece for Telephones; gives secrecy in conversation. Every telephone user a prospect. Retail \$1.00. Liberal profits. Write for full selling proposition. **Coylt Laboratories**, Dept. M, 565 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill.

MAKE \$25.00 DAILY SELLING COLORED RAINCOATS AND SLICKERS, RED, BLUE, GREEN, ETC. \$2.95. Hat Free. Commissions daily. Outfit FREE. **ELLIOTT BRADLEY**, 230 So. Wells, Dept. AA-4, Chicago.

AGENTS MAKE \$10.00 DAILY SELLING NON-SPLASH WATER-FILTERS ON SIGHT. BEST CANYASSER'S ARTICLE ON MARKET. Investigate. Write for particulars **DESK 25, SEED FILTER COMPANY**, 73 Franklin Street, New York.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—TOILET ARTICLES, PERFUMES AND SPECIALITIES. Wonderfully profitable. **LA DERMA CO.**, Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

STRANGE INVENTION! Pays \$25 Daily. Keeps telephone and iron cords from tangling and kinking. Prevents iron scorching. Saves electricity. Samples free. **NEVERKNOT**, Dept. 5-P, 4503 Ravenswood, Chicago.

AGENTS WANTED TO SELL MEN'S HATS DIRECT FROM FACTORY. Better grade, latest style creations at price of lower grades. Write for catalog. **MODEL HAT MFG. CO.**, Dept. M-6, East Orange, N. J.

LOCAL PARTNER WANTED. EVERY CITY, TOWN AND VILLAGE. NEW PLAN. 3 SHIRTS FREE and \$7.00 AN HOUR. AMAZING VALUES. FASHION WEAR SHIRTS, **DESK 56, CINCINNATI, OHIO.**

A GOLD MINE—TAKE ORDERS LIQUID MEND FOR FABRICS—HOSIERY. STOP! RUNS. EVERY WOMAN BUYS. 100 OTHER FAST SELLERS. **J. E. JOHNSON CO.**, DEPT. 5164, 6129 WENTWORTH, CHICAGO.

STRANGE BATTERY COMPOUND CHARGES DISCHARGED BATTERIES INSTANTLY. Eliminates rentals. GIVES NEW LIFE AND PEP. Big Profits. Gallon Free. **MICKMAN CO.**, St. Paul, Minn.

AGENTS—WE START YOU IN BUSINESS AND HELP YOU SUCCEED. NO CAPITAL OR EXPERIENCE NEEDED. SPARE OR FULL TIME. YOU CAN EASILY EARN \$50-\$100 WEEKLY. WRITE **MADISON MANUFACTURERS**, 564 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

MISCELLANEOUS

RELIEVE THAT HEADACHE. NO DRUGS. NEW METHOD OFFERED FIRST TIME TO PUBLIC. ORIGINAL HEAD COMPRESS. \$1.00 MONEY ORDER. **GOLDSMITH, P. O. BOX 1806, CINCINNATI, OHIO.**

STORIES WANTED

STORY IDEAS WANTED FOR PHOTOPLAYS AND MAGAZINES. BIG DEMAND. REVISED, TYPED, PUBLISHED. SOLD ON COMMISSION. SEND MANUSCRIPTS FOR FREE CRITICISM. **UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORPORATION**, 407 Security Bldg., Santa Monica & Western Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

STAMMERING

ALL SPEECH DEFECTS EASILY AND PERMANENTLY CURED. 10,000 CASES SUCCESSFULLY TREATED. EST. 25 YEARS. SEND FOR LARGE FREE CATALOG AND FULL INFORMATION. **MILLARD INSTITUTE OF NORMAL SPEECH**, 2332 MILLARD BLDG., MILWAUKEE, WIS.

STAMPS AND RARE COINS

OLD MONEY WANTED—WILL PAY FIFTY DOLLARS FOR NICKEL OF 1913 WITH LIBERTY HEAD (NO BUFFALO). WE PAY CASH PREMIUMS FOR ALL RARE COINS. SEND 4 CENTS FOR LARGE COIN FOLDER. MAY MEAN MUCH PROFIT TO YOU. **NUMISMATIC CO.**, DEPT. 125, FT. WORTH, TEXAS.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

To every young man who plays ball

BABE RUTH writes:



I'VE just been trying out some mitts and gloves that the Reach Company made up in line with my ideas on what major league equipment should be like. And I want to tell you, they've done a great job.

Of course these gloves are made out of the finest horsehide, and in the best way—but what I'm tickled with is the way they act. They're big and roomy and comfortable, yet they fit the hand just right. They move and bend just as natural and easy as my fingers. They have that already-broken-in feeling, if you get what I mean.

This Reach Company has been making gloves for so many years, they've got the knack of building catching quality right into a glove. Any ball that hits them, sure sticks in them, I'll say that.

They named these gloves after me, and they got my signature on every one, to show I approve them. I sure do! They'll help anybody's playing—fielding, back of the bat, or on the old first bag.

Babe Ruth

REACH Major League

Mitts and Gloves

DESIGNED BY BABE RUTH

The nearest Reach dealer will be glad to show you the Babe Ruth Line of mitts and gloves. See them. Try them. And you'll know what we mean by *Major League* gloves.



RF1—\$5.00



RF2—\$3.50



RFO—\$8.00



RB1—\$5.00



RC2—\$5.00

FREE BOOKLET... "Playing Pointers"

A. J. REACH, WRIGHT & DITSON, INC.
Tulip and Eyre Sts., Philadelphia, Pa.

Please send me, free, your booklet
"PLAYING POINTERS", together with
leaflet describing fully every glove in
the Babe Ruth Line.

Name.....

Street.....

Town..... State.....

A. F. F.—4-28

© 1928, A. J. R. W. & D., Inc.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP AND INSTRUCTION

EARN \$120 TO \$250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. WE ASSIST YOU TO A POSITION AFTER COMPLETION OF THREE MONTHS' SPARE TIME HOME STUDY COURSE, OR REFUND YOUR MONEY. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30. STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

EARN \$25 WEEKLY SPARE TIME, writing for Newspapers and Magazines. Experience unnecessary. Copyright Book, "How to Write for Pay," Free. PRESS REPORTING INST., 997, St. Louis, Mo.

EARN MONEY AT HOME OIL PAINTING PHOTOS. Fascinating work with big pay. \$35.00 to \$100.00 a week and up. No experience necessary. We teach you. Professional Outfit Furnished. Write for FREE book. NATIONAL ART SCHOOL, Dept. T-7, 1008 N. Dearborn, Chicago.

U. S. GOVERNMENT JOBS. \$95.00 to \$225.00 Month. Steady work. Men—women, 18—50. Experience unnecessary. Sample coaching lessons with list positions—FREE. Write today—sure. Franklin Institute, Dept. B-1, Rochester, N. Y.

MEN—EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY: travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write AMERICAN FOREIGN DETECTIVE AGENCY, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

CANDY—MAKE YOUR OWN—Scientifically taught by mail; learn for pastime or business. Chocolates, Bon Bons, Nougats, Caramels, Fudges, Fondants, Salting Nuts. Write for particulars, or send \$1.00 for sample box candy, and first lesson. P. O. BOX 141, Chelsea, Mass.

MEN WANTING OUTDOOR WORK, qualify for Forest Ranger Position. Start \$125 month; cabin and vacation; patrol the forests; protect the game; give tourists information. Write MOKANE, Dept. M-12, Denver, Colo.

HELP WANTED—MALE

FOREIGN POSITIONS—MEN INTERESTED WORKING BEAUTIFUL, SUNNY SOUTH AMERICA. WRITE SOUTH AMERICAN SERVICE BUREAU, 14,600 Alma, Detroit, Mich.

MEN. GET FOREST RANGER JOB: \$125—\$200 MONTH AND HOME FURNISHED; HUNT, FISH, TRAP. For details, write NORTON INST., 242 Temple Court, Denver, Colo.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

WOMEN! SELL FEMINAID WONDER PRODUCTS. \$50 WEEKLY. RUBBER APRONS, SANITARY BELTS, STEPINS, SHADOW SKIRTS. YOU CANNOT FAIL. AMERICAN RUBBER PRODUCTS, DEPT. 490, PITTSBURGH, PA.

\$5—\$18 A DOZEN DECORATING PILLOW TOPS AT HOME. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. PARTICULARS FOR STAMP. TAPESTRY PAINT CO., 128, LAGRANGE, IND.

WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES WANTED. New invention prevents shoulder straps slipping. No more discomfort. Women adore it. Write for particulars and Free offer. LINGERIE "V" CO., 16 Lake St., North Windham, Conn.

TOBACCO

TOBACCO HABIT BANISHED. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM, no matter how strong your craving, no matter in what form you use tobacco, there is help for you. Just send postcard or letter for our Free Book. It explains everything. NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 812, Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS—Write for our free Guide Book, "How To Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of Invention for Inspection and Advice Free. Reasonable Terms. Prompt Service. Highest References. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—Write for our guide book, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of Invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND ADVICE. WATSON E. COLEMAN, REGISTERED PATENT LAWYER, 724 NINTH STREET, WASHINGTON, D. C.

PATENTS PROCURED: Trade Marks Registered—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing ideas free on request. IRVING L. McCATHRAN, 205 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 41-J Park Row, New York.



New Model Pocket Ben

The busier you are, the more you need a reliable watch.

This new model Pocket Ben is that kind—and it's not only good-looking but sturdy—dependable.

Sold everywhere for \$1.50. With night-and-day dial, \$2.25.

*Built by the makers of
Big Ben and other Watches*

WESTERN CLOCK
COMPANY
La Salle, Illinois

New Auto Clock

Attractive, convenient, reliable. Fits any car. Quickly attached on dash or above wind-shield.

\$250



There where the big fish strike



Your favorite fly flicks for a second on the quiet water. . . . Twice, three times you cast. . . . Then whirr! . . . You've hooked a big one. Quickly and easily your partner brings the "Old Town" around and holds it in position for the battle.

"Old Towns" respond instantly to every dip of the blade. Sturdy in construction and light in weight too. When you go out where the big ones strike, be sure that you go in an "Old Town." Prices as low as \$67. From dealer or factory.

New catalog gives prices and complete information about sailing canoes, square-stern canoes, dinghies, etc. Also fast, seaworthy boats for Outboard Motors. Write for free copy today. OLD TOWN CANOE CO., 824 Middle Street, Old Town, Maine.

"Old Town Canoes"

BECOME A PHOTOGRAPHER!

Fascinating Work—BIG PAY—Learn Quickly

Earn \$50 to \$250 Weekly



Write for Free Fascinating Illustrated Book. Tells how you can become a successful Movie Photographer, Portrait, Commercial or News Photographer. Learn in your spare time at home or at our New York studios. Free Employment Service. Est. 1910.

N. Y. INSTITUTE OF PHOTOGRAPHY
10 W. 33rd St., N. Y. Dept. 80



MEN WANTED FOR RAILROADS

Nearest their homes—everywhere—to train for Firemen, Brakemen; beginners \$150-\$250 monthly. Promoted to Conductor or Engineer—\$3,000-\$4,000 yearly—highest wages on railroads. Also clerks.

Railway Educational Association, Dept. D-27-4 Brooklyn, N. Y.

Become Auto Expert

McSweeney Schools quickly train men to become auto and tractor repair experts. Only a few weeks required. Most successful and practical shop methods used. Graduates go into business for themselves or accept big pay jobs. Get big auto book FREE, and remarkable low tuition offer, including Railroad Fare and Board.

McSWEENEY AUTO, TRACTOR and ELECTRICAL SCHOOLS

Dept. 20-DM.
Cincinnati, Ohio Cleveland, Ohio

Earn
\$50 to \$125
Weekly

GET RID OF YOUR FAT Free Trial Treatment

sent on request. Ask for my "pay-when-reduced" offer. I have successfully reduced thousands of persons, without starvation diet or burdensome exercise, often at a rapid rate. Let me send you proof at my expense.

DR. R. NEWMAN, Licensed Physician
State of New York, 286 Fifth Ave., N. Y. Desk M



those "Some-Day" Trips

PLACES you haven't visited—yet! Tours you've long planned. Fishing jaunts to lakes and streams where "big ones" have waited too long — for you!

Make those "some-day" trips this summer. You can afford them all with a Harley-Davidson. Fifty miles costs you only one dollar — just 2¢ per mile for gas, oil, tires, everything!

A Harley-Davidson Twin has power that laughs at hills — comfort that smooths out rough roads — safety features that make you complete master of every highway and trail.

Know the thrill of motorcycling. Let your local dealer demonstrate the Twin. Ask him, too, about his convenient Pay-As-You-Ride Plan.

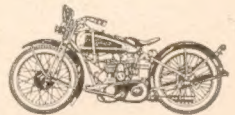
Send the coupon for literature and full details.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.
Department A. F. Milwaukee, Wis.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON Motorcycles

The Single

The famous low-cost, high-powered solo mount. 80 safe, quick miles per gallon of gasoline — one cent per mile! Completely equipped, f.o.b. factory, \$235.



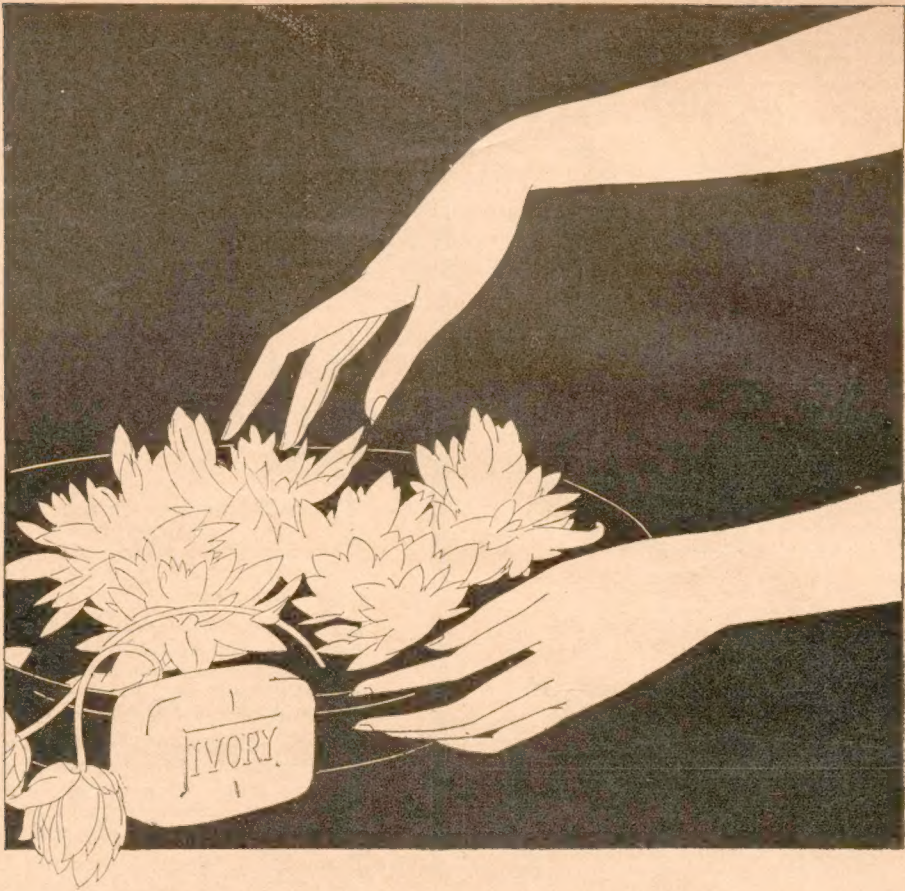
HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.
Department A. F., Milwaukee, Wis.

Send literature describing ☐ The Twin
☐ The Single. ☐ Details of your dealer proposition. Is my territory open?

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....



Lovely—though busy all day long

Hands are grateful things. They repay you in beauty if you give them gentle care—if you protect them with Ivory *while* they work.

For, after all, the one thing most destructive of hands' smooth whiteness is harsh soap. Harsh soap spoils the nicest manicure. It reddens hands and parches the skin into tiny lines.

But the very same pure Ivory that you use for

your complexion will do all your soap-and-water tasks, and protect your hands all day.

When you wash dishes, or the children's clothes, or your creamy woodwork with Ivory Soap, you are merely giving your hands an Ivory *bath*. And Ivory baths, however frequent, can do your hands no harm. Hands that use Ivory "for everything" stay smooth and white and lovely.

PROCTER & GAMBLE

IVORY SOAP

KIND TO EVERYTHING IT TOUCHES

99⁴⁴/₁₀₀ % Pure



© 1928, P. & G. Co.

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOLUME 194

SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 1928

NUMBER 1



Damming Hairpin Cañon

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When the sheriff is crooked and a lady is in distress, what can a man accustomed only to riding bucking flivvers do?

CHAPTER I.

COGWHEELS OF FATE.

C-R-R-ACK!

An irregular volley of shots rang out. The flash of guns stabbed through the midnight darkness.

There was war along Hairpin

Cañon; and the cause of it ran back to those dim, geological ages, maybe twenty million years ago, when a vast upheaval of the earth's crust formed the mountain ranges and valleys of New Mexico.

In that churning, volcanic ferment a chunk of red-hot, molten stuff was

flung up, which, as it cooled and crystallized, became a crag of porphyry, porphyry, hard and impervious as glass.

A little spring high up on the mountainside, seeking an outlet for itself down to the lowlands and the sea, gradually cut a channel through the surrounding softer rock. But when it reached that jutting porphyry crag, it was forced to admit itself baffled, and had to flow around it.

So it happened that when the early pioneers explored the deep rift which through centuries of effort the little stream had worn away, they came upon a peculiar bend, where the channel almost doubled on itself.

They paid slight attention to the circumstance, beyond using it to supply a name for the cañon; and the men who later on laid the locality off into political subdivisions took no account of it at all. They simply laid a ruler on the map, and, drawing a straight line, wrote Bridger County on one side of it, and Los Chicos County on the other.

And there the seeds of trouble were planted; for the result was, that, although the rest of the entire course of Hairpin Cañon and the trickling brook at the bottom of it lay on the Bridger County side, the bend around the porphyry crag extended for an appreciable distance over across the Los Chicos County line.

Still for years the matter excited no especial interest. The rattlesnakes and tarantulas which chiefly populated the section apparently cared little where the line ran; and the few listless, discouraged human inhabitants were almost as indifferent to it.

As for fighting over the question! What on earth, they would have asked you, was there in either Los Chicos or Bridger County worth fighting about? Doubtless the good Lord knew why He had created such a region; but nobody else had ever been able to figure out a plausible reason.

It looked like a portion left over

from the time the earth was without form and void. Tumbled hills of crumbling, black lava, fissured by sandy *arroyos*. Barren, windswept valleys with never a sprig of green. Soil like powdered bone dust. Air like the breath of a furnace. The dryness of a prohibitionist's heaven. Outside of that tiny creek in the bed of Hairpin Cañon, not enough water in the whole five thousand square miles of it to fill a bird's bathtub.

Once, it is true, Los Chicos County had experienced a brief season of prosperity. Dave Todd, an elderly prospector, burrowing in the rocks up above Hairpin Cañon, had struck gold—enough to make him rich beyond his dreams, and bring a horde of other gold seekers flocking to the scene.

The mining camp, named Rio Rita, which quickly sprang up at the spot, doubled its population almost daily, and beginning to assume an air of permanence, was made the county seat. Dave Todd, now the magnate of the place, built himself a great stone castle on the top of a near-by mountain, ran for Congress, and otherwise essayed the pastimes of the wealthy.

Then he died, and almost simultaneously the gold strike played out. The gold hunters and the dance hall girls and the faro dealers vanished overnight; and Los Chicos County speedily reverted to its primal, hopeless state. Rio Rita, although remaining the seat of local government, dwindled to a mere dead-and-alive, back country village.

And so things continued until Molly Todd, Dave's nineteen-year-old daughter, and the sole heir to his fortune, returned to her childhood home after six years spent at fashionable Eastern schools and in travel.

She was a young woman of modern ideas and with an overflowing energy, and the sight of the sterility and desolation all about sickened her. Thousands of acres belonging to her patrimony were a mere desert waste, serv-

ing only for the propagation of thorny mesquite and cactus.

Guided by her feminine instinct for setting things right, Molly evolved a daring conception. She had been through the Imperial Valley of California and at other places where irrigation was in use, and had seen the results accomplished by it. Why not apply such a system here, she asked herself, and change Los Chicos County from an eyesore to an Eden?

She had, moreover, an actual demonstration to go by on her own estate; for when Dave Todd built his castle, he had put in an artesian well and the land all about was in a high state of cultivation.

Fired by enthusiasm, Molly called in her ranch manager, "Big Bill" Davis, an ex-Texan ranger who worshiped the ground she walked on, and laid her project before him.

"H-m!" He scratched his grizzled head dubiously. "That spells trouble."

"How?" she asked.

"Lots of ways. For one thing, it's going to cause fightin'."

"Fightin'?"

"Sure. The only place you can get any water—'cept'n you spend a mint of money borin' wells—is at that there bend in Hairpin Cañon, where the creek loops over to this side of the line; and that's going to get the Bridger County folks up on their ear."

"Why should it? They're making no use of the water, or even planning to use it."

"Don't make no difference," he responded. "The minute they hear we're fixing to put a dam across that cañon, we'll have 'em after us like a swarm of hornets. They'll claim their rights is being invaded; and, gee, what a ruckus they'll stir up over it!"

"That's human natur', Miss Molly, 'speshully Western human natur'. I've seen the same thing many a time at waterhole fights over in the Panhandle, with more blood spilt on account of it

'n' all the water 't 'd ever come out of the springs they was scrapping about.

"'Sides," he went on warningly, "Bridger County ain't all you've got to stack up against. You'll have your worries on this side of the line, too. There's the sweetest little bunch of double crossers down to Rio Rita 't you ever got tangled up with."

"The county commissioners, you mean?" said Molly.

"Them same three Jesse Jameses," Big Bill nodded. "Ain't no bridge, nor culvert, nor public work of no kind, but what they get their cut out of it. And the schemes they can hatch up to make graft for 'emselves! My sufferin' cats!"

"No, you take my advice, ma'am," he urged earnestly, "and let Los Chicos County wiggle on as she is. Believe me, you won't do nothing with this business but get into a nasty mess. And if you give them crooks down at the courthouse half a chance, they're apt to break you. Only things I ever see a public benefactor get yet is a kick in the pants."

But Molly, aflame with the zeal of the crusader, was not to be dissuaded. She took her proposition before the local authorities, and after her interview with the board of county commissioners could not but believe that Big Bill had voiced an unfounded slander against three worthy citizens.

They were Mr. Fenton, the Rio Rita undertaker; Mr. Creel, the garage proprietor; and Mr. Thornley, a small ranchman from the northern part of the county—slow-speaking, simple-minded men who seemed to take their duties seriously, and be incapable of guile.

They listened with interest to Molly's exposition of her idea, and after some deliberation gave it unqualified indorsement, promising her their hearty support and coöperation. And, in fact, nothing could have gone more smoothly than the preliminary stages of inquiry and discussion.

Then one day the question came up as to just how the finances of the thing were to be handled. Molly triumphantly presented a plan which had been worked out for her by one of the leading lawyers of the State, and which obviated any possibility of graft.

The commissioners raised no open objection, but immediately thereafter the undertaking began to encounter interruptions and checks of various sorts. Some unknown but powerful influence was apparently chucking a series of monkey wrenches into the machinery.

"Jes' showin' you what they can do," explained Big Bill Davis cynically. "Servin' notice, you might call it, an' it means: No sugar, no irrigation."

Yet the three officials seemed so honestly puzzled and perturbed over the obstructive manifestations that Molly was still loath to believe them responsible.

Finally the time approached when the matter would have to be submitted to the voters on the question of a bond issue; and when she asked as to the probable outcome, Mr. Fenton, the undertaker, shook his head in his most gloomy, professional manner.

"I can't understand it, Miss Todd," he murmured sympathetically. "I simply can't understand it. Everybody seemed so favorable to the idee at the start; and now— Well, we can only hope for the best. But I am afraid, Miss Todd, I am very much afraid, that unless steps of some kind is took, we air beat."

"What kind of steps?" inquired Molly.

"Well, I couldn't exactly say as to that. Mebbe you'd better consult Mr. Creel. He might suggest somep'n."

Mr. Creel, the garage proprietor, proved equally pessimistic, but more direct.

"Ain't no question but what somebody's throwin' sand into the gears, and I 'low I can make a pretty close guess on who's doing it." He cocked his eyes significantly. "Opposition

comes mostly from the northern end of the county, don't it? And we all know who runs things up there."

"Mr. Thornley, you mean?" Molly frowned.

The garage man nodded.

"He's been saying right from the start that he didn't see why folks up that way should pay for something that chiefly benefits us down here. And that's the argument that's going to beat us, Miss Todd. People are beginning to think that this is nothing but a scheme to help out the Todd estate at their expense.

"Tell you, though," he hesitated, dropping his voice, "Thornley, like the rest of us, ain't none too well fixed, and as I happen to know is pretty deep in debt. So, mebbe, if the proposition was so framed that he could see something in it for himself—

"Course, I don't hold with nothing like that myself," he broke off hastily. "And neither does Fenton." Evidently Thornley had been cast for the rôle of the wicked partner. "But you see how it is. Unless we can manage to swing him over the proposition is ditched."

"Just so," said Molly quietly. "And—er—how much do you think it would require to change Mr. Thornley's views?"

A glint of greed came into the garage man's face.

"Something substantial," he declared. "Something quite substantial, I should say. You see, he wouldn't get it all hisself. There'd be—there'd be others to divide with."

"I see," returned Molly, still in that quiet tone. "And please tell Mr. Thornley—and the others—that they can go ahead and crack their whips; for they won't get one red cent."

Then she went down to El Paso to consult her bankers. On her return she announced that the irrigation system would be paid for, not by bonds against the entire community, but merely against the property to be di-

rectly benefitted—what are called assessment bonds—and that she pledged herself personally to take up the entire issue.

With the proposition submitted in that form, she threw herself into a whirlwind campaign covering the whole county; and after three strenuous, sleepless weeks of stump-speaking and hand-shaking and brass bands and waving banners, won out on election day by the scant margin of twenty votes.

"Well, what have you got to say now, old wet blanket?" She turned triumphantly to Big Bill on the receipt of the final returns.

"Nothin'." He stroked his chin reflectively. "Only don't think that this puts the water into them irrigation ditches. Not yet. Them connivers is already figgerin' on some way of horn-in' in on the layout. They'll never give up as long as there's a penny in sight.

"Also," he added ominously, "it's about time that Bridger County was beginning to set up and take notice. I shouldn't be surprised, ma'am, but what you heard something from that quarter in the next few days."

He proved a true prophet. Bridger County, content to abide in watchful waiting until some definite step had been taken, roused to alarm at the news of the election results. This meant business; and every loyal Bridgerite vowed through his tangled whiskers to resist the threatened encroachment at any cost.

It was a dog-in-the-manger attitude for them to take, of course, since, except for a narrow bench or plateau immediately adjacent to the cañon, their territory was unsusceptible of irrigation. All the water that had ever run through Hairpin Creek could not have washed into fertility those granite mountain slopes of which it chiefly consisted.

Nevertheless, in the West, water rights are water rights; and, as Big

Bill had said, men will fight for them as they fight for nothing else.

The first step naturally was a resort to the law. Bridger County launched a flock of injunctions, and appealed to the Legislature to reestablish the county line, on a claim that the obvious intention of the map makers had been to follow the course of Hairpin Cañon.

Los Chicos County responded with a barrage of counterinjunctions and cross petitions. Writs and restraining orders flew from one side of the cañon to the other in a raging blizzard.

Split into factions over the irrigation question up to the time of election, the Los Chicos people rallied to it now as one man in the face of this attack from without. For the time being, Molly and the county commissioners with their respective followers stood shoulder to shoulder against the common enemy.

The courts ground on with their usual round of motions, delays, demurrers and appeals. Meanwhile feeling on both sides rose higher and higher. It got to be so intense that for a Bridger County man to speak to one from Los Chicos, or vice versa, was regarded as little short of treachery and almost valid cause for a lynching.

Then, as might have been expected, a clash occurred. The county surveyor of Los Chicos was out one day with his corps of assistants running a line down into Hairpin Cañon. His job was in no way connected with the irrigation proposition, merely to set the boundaries for a piece of private property.

But somebody saw him and spread a rumor that the Los Chicos people, in defiance of the injunctions against them, had started work on the dam.

Bridger County never stopped to inquire as to the basis for the report, but grabbing up the nearest firearm—rifle, shotgun, or revolver—hurried to the scene of the outrage.

The arriving vanguard found the surveyor undoubtedly there, down in

the bed of the cañon. Some hot-head—it was never established just who—opened fire on the party with a repeating rifle, killing the surveyor and wounding two of his men.

Los Chicos County promptly went wild with Berserk fury. The surveyor had been a harmless, kindly old man, well liked if not overly competent. His constituents, determined to avenge the cowardly murder and teach the Bridgerites a lesson, swarmed down to the cañon.

For two nights and a day the opposing forces banged away at each other across the debated ground, with a great expenditure of powder and ammunition, but without especial damage to either side.

Then State troops, hurriedly dispatched by the Governor to end the conflict, arrived. The combatants sullenly dispersed. But the bad blood engendered by the incident did not die down. On both sides of the line there was muttered talk of reprisals, and an ugly feeling persisted, which at any time was apt to flame into renewed warfare.

And on top of that the irrigation project encountered another stumbling block, which looked more serious than anything that had come up yet. The new county surveyor, in checking over the records of his somewhat careless predecessor discovered that a woeful mistake had been made in the latter's calculations.

The flow of water in Hairpin Creek was not alone sufficient to furnish the amount required for the system planned. It would have to be helped out by an elaborate pumping plant, thus increasing the expense of the undertaking to practically prohibitive figures.

Los Chicos County, panic-stricken, sent out an S O S call for experts from the State engineer's office. But these, when they came, only confirmed the disheartening report of the local man. Molly's brave enterprise, which she had carried through against so many dis-

couragements and obstacles, seemed at last hopelessly on the rocks.

Still no one has a monopoly on misfortune. On the same day that Molly's cherished plans came this cropper, Norman Rich lost his job with Blair & Co., of Detroit.

Not much connection between two such widely separated happenings, one might say. But in this world of chance you never can tell just how the cog-wheels of fate are going to mesh.

CHAPTER II.

A SQUARE PEG IN A ROUND HOLE.

THE blue envelope was about the last thing on earth that Norman Rich had reason to expect.

He had been with Blair & Co., a big machinery concern, ever since boyhood, winning steady promotion until he had finally arrived at a staff position of considerable importance, with every assurance of still further advancement ahead of him.

In addition, he appeared to stand ace-high with J. P. Blair, the head of the business, and even better with Gladys, the boss's only daughter. It had become almost a settled custom for him to dine two or three evenings a week at their big house out on Dearborn Boulevard; and knowing ones among his associates were predicting that before long he would take up his residence there permanently.

Then, for no apparent reason, he was canned. Oh, of course, the pill was sugar-coated to a certain extent. Instead of being fired outright he was given an opportunity to resign. But the results were the same. He was out.

Naturally he wanted to know why. But all the satisfaction he could get in answer to his puzzled inquiries was some vague talk about departmental reorganization, which was palpably not an explanation, but a stall.

It never entered his head to connect his discharge in any way with Hair-

pin Cañon, or Molly Todd's irrigation scheme. In fact, if anybody had asked him regarding those two subjects he would probably have guessed that Molly Todd was the woman who made the first American flag, and Hairpin Cañon a new form of machine gun.

So, as all his conjectures on being let out seemed about equally wide of the mark, he gave up the mystifying riddle after a day or two, and set himself to looking for a new job.

But this proved not so easy as he had fondly hoped. His line was rather narrowly technical, and most of the machinery houses were already supplied with competent men of that sort.

There came then—to mix the movies up with Shakespeare—quite a winter of discontent for Norman. Finally, with his funds running low, and the outlook about as gloomy as a rainy day in February, he accepted in desperation a berth as salesman with a small concern in St. Louis, and was assigned to the Southwest as his territory.

Dutifully he canvassed the States of Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and California for his firm; but since about all he sent back to the house were his weekly expense accounts, prospects began to look bright for Norman returning to the ranks of the unemployed.

Then, one sweltering night at Fresno, when things seemed at their lowest ebb, and he sat dejected and forlorn in the hotel office, he happened to overhear three men discussing the question of irrigation machinery.

They were evidently back-country Westerners, sun-dried, tawny-mustached, drawling of speech; and they seemed so hazy and ill-informed on the subject at issue that Norman, overcoming his natural bashfulness, could not help breaking in to set them right.

Irrigation machinery was his long suit; and once started on it, he was soon talking away six to the dozen, spilling facts and figures in a steady stream, while the three men hung entranced upon his words.

It developed in the course of the conversation that they were Fenton, Creel, and Thornley, the three commissioners of Los Chicos County, and were making an inspection trip to different irrigation plants in the hope of finding some solution to the problem which confronted them as a result of the miscalculation of their dead surveyor.

They confessed to Norman, however, that their investigation had proved distinctly discouraging, for it had been made plain to them that the engineering costs on their project would run so high as to leave nothing for the purchase of machinery. Los Chicos County was poor, they told him; and they did not see how the additional funds required could possibly be raised.

The upshot of the matter was that Norman accompanied them home, and put in three weeks there at his own expense, studying the situation. Then, with the aid only of the young county surveyor, he drafted a complete set of blue prints, plans and specifications for a pumping system capable of meeting every conceivable requirement in the case, yet still falling within the amount voted for the improvement.

Armed with these plans and the additional data he had gathered, he hurried on to St. Louis, and figured so painstakingly with the members of his firm that they were able to submit a bid on the work which he was satisfied no competitor could approximate.

So now, with the bids about to be opened and the contract awarded the following day, he was journeying back to New Mexico and Los Chicos County with a feeling of triumph; for his contract, he was sure, was as good as already in his pocket, and his house would reap a substantial profit on it.

As his train roared through the famed Raton Pass, and wound in and out among the towering mountains, he told himself elatedly that for once he had got the jump on the other boys, and had redeemed all his previous poor showing. Blair & Co. would begin

to realize that they had lost a valuable man when they let him out.

Blithely he swung himself down to the dusty platform at Los Chicos Junction—the point where he had to leave the main line and stop overnight, since there was no train out on the branch railroad to Rio Rita, the county seat, until the following morning—and, picking up his bag, started over toward the ramshackle, stucco hotel.

But halfway across the sun-baked plaza he suddenly stopped, the first faint splutter of a dynamite bomb sounding in his ears; for there upon the veranda, with his chair tilted back into the shade, sat Dick Crawford, debonair, star salesman for Blair & Co., of Detroit.

Then, as Norman stood halted, staring at this unwelcome spectacle, Crawford sprang excitedly to his feet.

"Back, you simp!" he shouted warningly, leaning over the veranda rail and waving his arms. "Jump back!"

Involuntarily Norman obeyed; and as he did so, it seemed to him that not metaphorical dynamite, but the real thing had struck him.

Something caught him with a jolt under the coat-tails, and, lifting him into the air, tossed him to one side and sent him sprawling, face downward, in the dust of the plaza.

He was not knocked unconscious; but the shock was sufficient to scatter his wits, and for a moment he lay there, uncertain just what had happened to him.

Then he felt himself being picked up and raised to a reclining position against somebody's knee; and when he had blinked the sand out of his eyes, he found himself gazing up into the face of the most beautiful girl he had ever seen in his life.

"Are you hurt?" she asked, her violet eyes full of solicitude.

But Norman was so taken aback by the vision of unexpected loveliness—all the women he had hitherto seen in Los Chicos County would have made a

mud fence seem pretty by comparison—that he could only goggle at her dazedly, and open and shut his mouth like a fish.

"No; I'm—I'm all right," he finally managed to gulp as she repeated her question. Realizing all at once how disheveled he must appear, and also that he was lying with his head in this strange young woman's lap, he blushed a violent crimson, and, scrambling to his feet, started brushing off his clothes.

"Oh, are you sure?" the girl persisted anxiously, still supporting him with a hand on his arm. "Of course, I only hit you sidewise with the corner of my fender, and you were thrown clear of the wheels. But you went down so heavily that I was afraid some bones might be broken."

Norman saw then what it was that had laid him low—a shining, high-powered roadster from which she had evidently dismounted hastily to render him assistance.

By this time, too, Dick Crawford, his Panama hat tilted jauntily on one side of his head, had come over from the hotel, and began trying to ingratiate himself by declaring that the accident had been all Norman's fault.

But instead of appearing grateful, the girl turned to him with a hostile flash in her eye.

"Your fault, you mean!" she snapped. "I could have avoided him easily if you hadn't called out like a ninny, and made him jump back right in the path of my machine. So the least you can do now is to stop that stupid chatter and lend a hand here to help him over to the hotel."

Crawford, who had rather a reputation as a lady killer, didn't quite know how to take it. He was not accustomed to being addressed so curtly by members of the other sex. The half smirk he had bestowed upon her was replaced by a sort of sulky pout.

"Don't you hear me?" The girl flung up her head impatiently. "Catch

hold of his other arm, I tell you. With the two of us holding him up, he can probably make it."

But Norman had now pulled himself together, and disclaimed any necessity for assistance.

"Thank you ever so much," he stammered bashfully to the girl. "But, believe me, I am quite all right. A little soap and water for my face and hands, and a few strokes with a clothes brush will repair all the damage. Please don't bother any more. I have only my own awkwardness to blame."

Nevertheless, she insisted on walking beside him over to the hotel, leaving the crestfallen Crawford to stand there in the blazing sunshine, and gape after them uncertainly.

Then, as they got out of his earshot her manner changed abruptly.

"Listen, Mr. Rich—it is Mr. Rich, isn't it?—I've got to have a talk with you," she said earnestly, dropping her voice almost to a whisper. "I drove in to the junction this afternoon solely for that purpose. And yet I don't want any one to suspect what I am up to."

"Let me see; just how shall we manage it?" She knitted her brows. "You are really sure that you're not hurt in any way? Well," as he nodded, "I am afraid you'll have to develop a sprained wrist just the same."

"Run along and get yourself cleaned up," she said; "and when you are all straightened out again meet me in the writing room just off the upper veranda. And don't forget," she reminded him under her breath, "that your right arm is absolutely helpless."

Bewilderedly he went on into the office, remembering his supposed injury just in time to avoid a blunder as the clerk poked the pen out to him to register.

"Guess I'll have to ask you to write for me." He caught himself up as he started to reach for it. "I've sprained my ankle—I—I mean my wrist."

His confusion over this slip of the

tongue wasn't helped any by the snickers of a couple of tourists leaning against the desk; and he was still red as a beet and cursing himself for his inadvertence when he got to his room.

Then, just as he was fairly started on his ablutions, there came a knock at the door; and when he opened it, blinking through the soap in his eyes, a half-breed Mexican bellboy pushed into his arms a great roll of gauze, a box of absorbent cotton, and a huge bottle of liniment.

"What's this?" Norman stared at the bundle. "Some mistake."

"No, señor; he ees for your sore wrest. Mees Mollitod send heem to you."

"Who?" demanded Norman. "Oh," with a flash of inspiration, "you mean Miss Molly Todd, eh? All right." And he took the stuff in, and closed the door.

But the information he had extracted only served to deepen the mental fog in which he was groping. Molly Todd? She had been away when he was in Los Chicos County before working out his pumping plans, and he had been rather carefully herded off from any of her adherents.

But he had heard her name mentioned not infrequently in the conversation of the county commissioners, and usually coupled with such uncomplimentary epithets as "Pizen scratch-cat," and "Fussy old hen."

From these comments Norman had evolved a mental picture of her as a leather-faced, sharp-nosed, busybody old maid of the type that used to be caricatured in comic valentines. It took him a moment or two to adjust himself to the fact that the real Molly Todd was none other than the delectable vision who had knocked him endways in more senses than one.

Yet, even when he had got that into his head he was still hopelessly at sea. Why was she so anxious to have this private conference with him?

It was conceivable, of course, that

as a large taxpayer she might want to know something about the proposed irrigation plant, but where was the necessity for all this secrecy and subterfuge?

After vainly scratching his head over the question for a minute or two, Norman finally decided wisely that the quickest way to clear up the matter was to find out what she had to say.

Nevertheless he took time to shave meticulously and change to what he regarded as his most becoming suit. Also, he spent precious minutes debating over the shirt and tie he should wear; and it seemed as if he would never get the part in his hair to his liking.

But at last, with a final lingering survey of himself in the glass, he decided that he might pass muster, and was just about to dash out of the room when his eye happened to fall on the array of surgical dressings she had sent up to him.

Hastily he paused to slap a wad of cotton on his wrist, and wrap about a yard of gauze around it; he passed up the liniment, labeled as good for either man or beast, since one sniff of it convinced him that it would make him smell like a livery stable; then he hurried on his way.

He found Molly waiting for him in the writing room as she had promised. But her foot was tapping impatiently, and the pains he had taken with his appearance didn't seem to make any hit with her.

In fact, her eyes rested with such marked disfavor on his arm that Norman involuntarily dropped his own gaze to it, and saw to his dismay that the loosely wound bandage had come undone and was trailing after him like a streamer.

So viciously did he grab at it in his embarrassment and, yanking it in, begin stuffing it up his sleeve, that the girl had to laugh in spite of herself.

"Come here," she told him, "and let me fix that for you right."

Then, as she deftly rewound the bandage on his wrist and fastened it securely, she asked him severely why he had not used the liniment she sent him.

"It smells to heaven," muttered Norman excusingly.

"Sure it does," she nodded. "That is why I got it. It pays to advertise." And look at that perfectly knotted tie and the mathematical part to your hair!" she exclaimed witheringly. "Do you expect any one to believe you ever got such results with a single hand? Rumple them up now while you have the chance, or I'll do it for you."

She looked so capable of carrying out her threat that Norman hastily thrust his fingers up through his plastered locks and disarranged the offending tie. But at the same time he could not help mumbling to himself that he failed to see the sense of all this play-acting hokum.

"Oh, don't you?" Molly caught him up sharply, her somewhat quizzical tone becoming serious. "Well, if you will pretend now to be dictating letters to me, maybe I can make it clear. Mr. Rich"—she leaned toward him impressively—"I came here to-day to warn you."

"To warn me?" Norman drew back a little. He wondered if possibly she was a bit daft from living all alone in these wilds, as he had heard she did. "Warn me of what?"

"That's what I don't exactly know." She frowned thoughtfully. "But I was hoping that between us we might be able to puzzle it out."

"You see," she explained, "I want to see you get that contract; for, although I was down to El Paso when you were here before, I know all that you did for us, and I think you have earned it."

"I can tell you, though, that unless you do something mighty pronto, those horned toads over at the courthouse are going to ditch you."

"Horned toads at the courthouse?"

Norman was a little slow to get her meaning. "Oh, the board of commissioners, eh? But they have always been most friendly to me, Miss Todd."

"Friendly?" She gave a sniff. "The only thing those three were ever friendly to is their own pocketbooks. If you knew of all that I've been through with them. But no need of going into that. This is some new piece of skulduggery that they are hatching. And I am sure that it's aimed at you."

"Answer me just one question, Mr. Rich. Is there any graft for them in awarding you this contract?"

"Certainly not."

"I thought as much; and that is the reason I've been suspicious. If everything's on the level, why have they been holding so many secret conferences with this slick salesman from Detroit?"

"Secret conferences!" Norman's jaw dropped. "With Crawford?"

"Just that. He came here about a month ago, just after you left for St. Louis; and ever since, Fenton, Thornley and Creel have been slipping off quietly two or three times a week to meet him at Santa Fe, stopping at the best hotels there and being entertained at his expense."

"They thought nobody knew anything about it"—her lips curled scornfully—"but they've got to get up early in the morning to keep me from spotting their curves. Still, although I know of these meetings, I haven't been able to discover what they're about."

"There's a nigger in the woodpile, of course, but just where, I can't seem to figure out. That's what I want you to tell me."

CHAPTER III.

THE CALL FOR 6.45.

NORMAN was plainly disturbed over the intelligence he had received, but was unable to offer any clew in regard to the significance of it.

"The job is bound to go to the lowest bidder," he muttered argumentatively. "And I am satisfied that no one could have figured closer on it than I did."

He seemed inclined to think that this settled the matter. "What can Crawford or anybody else do?" he asked.

Molly looked disappointed. She had hoped that he might suggest some explanation for the mysterious activities on the part of the county commissioners.

"Well, all I know," she said a shade tartly, "is that those highbinders are up to something. And lowest bid or not, you'd better get wise to what it is."

The rancor in her tone again roused that half suspicion in Norman's mind that she might be a trifle unbalanced. People who lived much to themselves—sheep herders and the like—were apt to get strange delusions, usually about plots or conspiracies.

Possibly this hostility she showed toward the ruling powers might be due to something of the kind. Certainly none of the three mild-mannered commissioners struck him as the scheming villains she painted them.

Yet, on the other hand, Molly Todd seemed the last person in the world one could consider cuckoo; and if she spoke the truth concerning these clandestine trips to Santa Fe to meet Crawford it undeniably looked as if funny business of some kind was afoot.

Perhaps she guessed the question in his mind, for, with another of her swift changes of manner, she bent toward him.

"I suppose, being a stranger here," she smiled, "you are wondering, Mr. Rich, how come I am running such a temperature over this thing, and what business I've got butting in anyhow? But I want you to know that this irrigation project is pretty close to my heart."

"Los Chicos County is not just a heap of rocks and sand to me, you understand." Her violet eyes softened.

"This is my birthplace, my home, and I love it. It's my ugly duckling that I want to see blossom into a princess. We have the soil and the climate here to grow anything, if only we had water. And when I saw what irrigation has done for other parts of the West, I determined that we must have it too.

"I started the agitation for a county owned system, and, without boasting, I can say that I was the one to put it over. And I was fought every step of the way by those three grafters over at the courthouse, simply because, as I had the proposition framed, they did not see a chance to get any money out of it for themselves.

"I flattered myself that I had the thing sewed up too tight for them to land even a crumb. But it begins to look now"—she made a grimace of chagrin—"as if they were smarter than I am. Or, more likely, your boy friend from Detroit has given them the steer, and—

"Careful!" she broke off with a warning whisper, and started busily writing. "Here he comes."

Shooting a glance back out of the corner of his eye, Norman saw Crawford enter the writing room and come sauntering down to a desk within easy hearing distance of where they sat. But, instead of appearing unobservant like his companion, he got flustered and lost his head, making sad work of the letter he was pretending to dictate to her.

Winning under her obvious disapproval of him, he quit his floundering efforts and leaned toward her.

"Listen," he growled, scarcely taking the trouble to lower his voice, "I am no good at this sort of thing, a perfect washout. What I am going to do is beat it over to Rio Rita, and face Fenton and the other commissioners with what you've told me. There's no train out until to-morrow morning, of course; but probably I can get a conveyance of some kind to take me there, and—"

"No," she whispered sharply; "you would only have your trouble for your pains. None of the three are at Rio Rita; they've ducked out somewhere. I've been trying vainly all day to locate them myself.

"A better plan, it seems to me," she counseled, "is for you to stick close to this Detroit fellow. He's the boastful, gabby sort; and maybe if you get him to talking, you can pick up some hint of what the game is."

She rose at that, and, gathering together the sheets she had written, handed them over to him.

"That is all, you say, Mr. Rich?" she continued aloud. "Very well, then, if you're sure that I can be of no further aid to you, I guess I'll be moving along.

"And do be careful of that poor wrist, won't you?" she interjected hastily, just in time to switch Norman over to his south paw in shaking hands with her.

Debating whether or not she would think him fresh if he asked her to stay to dinner with him, Norman was still clutching her fingers, when he heard Crawford's voice behind him.

"Pardon me, Rich," the salesman interrupted suavely, "but I think you dropped one of your samples out there on the plaza, didn't you?"

"One of my samples?" Norman stammered.

"Yes." Crawford drew a ragged pink corset from under his coat and laid it on the desk. "This is your line, isn't it?"

It was his revenge for the snub Molly had administered to him shortly before; and a group of other traveling men he had called in to witness his practical joke broke into raucous laughter at Norman's expression of discomfiture.

A quicker-witted person might have turned the laugh by a clever quip of some sort. A less self-conscious person might have joined in it. But Norman could only suffer.

The ridicule stung him like the flick of a whiplash across his face. Forgetting all about his supposed injury, he grabbed up the pink disgrace imputed to him, and with a throw that would have done credit to a center-fielder, flung it out of the window—to land right on the seat of Molly's roadster parked in the plaza below.

This added mishap was too much for Norman's nerves. Horrified, he stood there a moment staring at the faded roseate relic draped across the roadster's gray upholstery. His audience broke into derisive applause; and one of the tourists who had been at the desk when he started to register called jeeringly:

"Pretty good for a guy whose wrist was sprained too bad to write his name. Or was it your ankle, after all?"

The cackling mirth which greeted this sally was the last straw. Norman could stand no more. Without stopping to see how Molly was taking the incident, without even a glance at her, he stampeded wildly for the door, galloped up a flight of stairs outside and, slinking hurriedly through the corridors, finally reached his room, and locked the door behind him.

Panting, he sank down upon the side of the bed, and, jerking the bandage from his wrist, disgustedly tossed it into the wastebasket.

"That's what I get," he snarled, "for letting somebody try to make me do a lot of silly play acting."

After a moment or two, though, his sense of justice asserted itself.

"Can't really hold her responsible," he muttered. "Her scheme was all right, I guess. How was she to know that I was such an absolute dud."

"Well, I guess that settles me with her." He sighed drearily. "No woman's going to forgive a man that's made her ridiculous, even if he isn't to blame. Damn Crawford, anyhow!"

And, having found a proper target on which to vent his resentment, he let himself go in a flood of invective.

"A regular hoodoo; that's what that bird is to me!" He scowled. "Every time he shows up things start to going wrong."

"Look how it was at Blair & Co.'s," he harked back to his standing grievance. "Anybody'd have said I was fixed there for life; yet no sooner does he come along than out I go on my ear. And now, just when I'm sitting pretty again on this irrigation contract, he sneaks in to try and chisel me out of it."

"And on top of that he crabs me with the loveliest girl in the world. Oh, damn, damn, damn! It's almost like he was working the evil eye on me, or something of the kind."

The supper hour came as he sat there brooding, but nothing could have tempted Norman to run the gantlet of grinning glances he would have to face in the dining room, and he remained on where he was, nursing his woes.

Finally, however, there came a knock at the door. After hesitating a moment, he got up and opened it. The half-breed bellboy thrust an envelope out at him.

"From Mees Mollitod," he said.

Norman glanced at him suspiciously. Perhaps this was some new hoax of Crawford and his gang.

"When did this come?" he demanded.

"When she leave." The boy shrugged. "Mebbe, one hour, mebbe two hour ago. I could not find the señor before."

Norman tore it open, and ran his eye over the inclosure.

"Don't let them get your goat," he read. "Play Crawford for information as I suggested. I will meet you on the train to Rio Rita in the morning."

Just three lines, but it changed the whole aspect of the world. He wasn't crabbed with Molly after all. She still regarded him as an ally and a partner.

Emptying his pockets of silver, he showered it into the hand of the astonished half-breed; then, with head up and a defiant smile on his lips, he

marched down to the dining room, just managing to slide in as the doors were closing.

He got the cold fragments of what was left and the attentions of a sulky waitress, but it might have been nectar and ambrosia and Ritz-Carlton service, for all that Norman knew. He beamed all through the sorry meal, and was still beaming as he left a generous tip and made his way jauntily out to the office.

He thought at first the place was deserted, for he saw nobody about. The salesmen and tourists who had been around that afternoon had all taken their departure on the east-bound main line express.

But after a moment or two Crawford came out of a telephone booth, and stepped hurriedly over to the desk. From his manner and the frown he wore, Norman judged that something had gone wrong. He would have been still more certain of it if he could have overheard the colloquy that was carried on with the clerk.

"Listen, Frank," Crawford said urgently. "How can I get over to Rio Rita without waiting for that gosh-blamed train in the morning?"

"Well, there's a car you could hire," suggested the clerk. "But I'm warning you that it's a dangerous road to drive at night."

"Don't make any difference," snapped Crawford. "Order it around for me, will you? Gee! Why is it that just when you think everything is set, some bozo always has to get cold feet?"

Then as he turned grouchy away from the desk he happened to spy Norman, and paused a moment as if an idea had occurred to him.

"Hold on there, Frank!" He wheeled once more to the clerk. "Don't order that boiler just now. Or, rather, order it; but let it wait outside until I am ready. I don't think I'll start for a bit yet."

He glanced at the clock, then, smoothing out the disgruntled creases

from his forehead, strolled over to Norman.

"Hello, old-timer!" he smiled affably. "No hard feelings over a bit of fun we had this afternoon, I hope? Sure not. As I said to the boys: 'Don't worry. Rich is one fellow that knows how to take a joke.'"

"Well," he dropped into the vacant chair beside Norman's, "we lock horns at Rio Rita to-morrow, eh? You're taking the jerkwater over in the morning, I suppose?"

Norman nodded. "So Blair & Co. are bidding on the irrigation contract, too?" he said.

"Oh, yes." Crawford shrugged carelessly. "But more as a matter of advertisement than with any hope of landing it. The old man's got a bug now that our name must be represented at every award.

"Not a bad idea, maybe, but it kind of gravels me to be hung up in a dead-and-alive slab like this for nothing. Not even a movie show to go to."

He glanced at the clock again. "What do you say to a game of pinochle to pass the time away?"

Norman hesitated. He had been planning to retire early and get a good night's sleep, so as to have a clear head in meeting whatever contingencies might arise on the morrow.

Yet here was his opportunity to get Crawford into conversation and pump him, as Molly Todd had enjoined. So, changing his mind, he assented to the proposal, and a table and cards having been secured, they started to play.

Perhaps nothing could have shown more clearly the difference in the characters of the two men than the contrast in the way they played the game.

Norman was a slow, careful, conservative player, abiding strictly by the rules, and calculating to a mathematical nicety the chances of every hand before he made his bid; while Crawford went at it in slap-dash style, taking utterly unjustifiable risks, and often bringing off a coup by sheer audacity.

He was not above cheating a little, too, if he thought he could get away with it.

His chief reliance, though, lay in getting his opponent's goat. Skill at the game meant nothing to him. What he aimed at was to goad the other fellow into such a rage that forty jacks, pinochle, one hundred aces, or eighty kings all looked alike to him.

Before long he started in on these tactics with Norman.

Naturally it would rile a man who had lost out, he assumed, to hear of another's success with the house that had let him go. So he commenced to talk of the vastly increased business Blair & Co. were doing, and to brag of his own achievements in connection with it.

"Some life-saver I've been to that concern," he declared swaggeringly. "Why, you wouldn't know the old place, Rich. Don't be surprised if you hear when I get back from this trip that I've been made vice president and general sales manager of the company."

Still, although he kept hammering on in this strain, he couldn't notice any signs of rising blood pressure on the part of Norman. The latter continued to play his careful, methodical game, and win at least four hands out of five.

Crawford was unable to understand it. He didn't realize that Norman's was one of those logical minds that have room for only one thing at a time.

Just now he was concentrating exclusively on Molly Todd's instructions. She had told him to get Crawford to blowing, on the chance that he might let slip something which would be of value to them.

Well, Crawford was certainly blowing all right. And since that was the object aimed at, it never occurred to Norman to lose his temper. He just sat tight, played pinochle, and listened for the fellow to make a break.

Crawford set his jaw, and made another attempt to shatter that unruffled calm.

"Vice president?" he scoffed. "That's only a stepping-stone. Believe me, Rich, it won't be long before I am the whole cheese. The old man's bound to retire in a year or so, and when he does, who so certain to slip into his shoes as his son-in-law?"

"Oh, yes," he affirmed as Norman glanced up at the statement. "That's on the cards, too. There's been no formal announcement of it yet, but I'm sure Gladys won't mind my telling an old friend like you of our engagement."

Six months or a year before that intelligence might have caused quite a twinge of the heart to Norman. But now it scarcely created a ripple of interest in his breast.

The image of Gladys Blair rose to his mind. Why, compared to Molly Todd, she was— But what was the use of talking? There was simply no comparison.

So he congratulated Crawford with cordial sincerity, and continued placidly with the game.

Also, he continued to win, and even more steadily than before. For Crawford, furious at his inability to rattle Norman, seemed to have lost his head entirely, and was playing in a way that would have disgraced a beginner.

The goat getter for once was having a taste of his own medicine.

Finally, stung by the loss of a game in which he was "set" for the limit, Crawford slammed his cards down furiously on the table.

"A fool for luck!" he shouted. "You haven't the brains of a gnat, and yet it seems nothing can head you off. You'll get yours to-morrow, though, you poor sap. And don't think that Molly Todd can help you, either."

"I saw you two with your heads together, but it won't do you any good. We've got you and that stuck-up, half-breed squaw both rigged. Want to know how? Well—"

But Norman had flung down his own cards, and was on his feet by this

time. He knew that he ought to keep quiet and let his angry rival spill the beans. But he simply couldn't do it.

"That 'll do, Crawford!" His voice had a rasping edge to it. "If you're going to bring Miss Todd's name into the conversation it will have to be in more respectful terms."

The other caught himself together with a realization of how loosely his tongue had been wagging.

"Oh, all right." He laughed uneasily. "No offense intended. Guess I was talking a lot of guff anyhow. I hardly know what I am saying when I get sore at the cards that way. It's over now, though, and I'll be good. Sit down, and let's play another hand."

"No." Norman shook his head decisively. "I am going to bed."

Crawford gave a hasty peep at his watch. His purpose had been to keep Norman up late; and he felt he had accomplished all that was required, so he made only a show of protest.

"Half past one?" He feigned an expression of surprise. "Well, probably we had better quit. Not much time left, is there, before they'll be routing us out in the morning?"

He followed Norman over to the desk, and heard him put in a call to be wakened in time for the seven thirty train to Rio Rita, but announced that he himself was too wide awake for bed yet, and would smoke a cigar to quiet his nerves before he turned in.

As Norman disappeared up the stairs, though, he turned back to the desk, and gave the clerk a significant wink. His annoyance over his petty losses at the cards had vanished by this time, and he was evidently intent on bigger game.

"The gentleman's apt to sleep pretty heavy after being up so late, don't you think, Frank?" he chuckled. "And it would be a shame to wake him up for any pesky old train. Just forget that call he left for the morning." He passed a bill across to the clerk as he spoke.

"And now how about that car I ordered? Still waiting outside, eh? All right, then, I'll be starting for Rio Rita. As the poet says about the wise guy: 'He, while boob companions slept, went toiling upward in the night.' Ain't it the truth, Frank?"

The night clerk, watching him as he passed out the door, murmured: "There's a bozo who certainly hates himself."

Then he glanced at the denomination of the bill which Crawford had given him: and, finding it satisfactory, scratched off the call that Norman had left for six forty-five.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STROKE OF TWELVE.

A LONG session at cards is poor preparation for a night of restful slumber.

Norman tried to compose himself, but in spite of all he could do, a maddening succession of pinochle hands kept running through his head, and his mind continued to revolve the events and actions of the evening.

He knew that he had been wrong in stopping Crawford just when the latter was on the point of blurting out the details of whatever intrigue was being carried on in connection with the irrigation contract.

Molly Todd, if she ever learned of it, would probably be ready to scalp him. And yet he felt that he would do the same thing over again. His only regret was that he had not smashed Crawford in the mouth for his offensive epithets.

And, after all, he asked himself, what had been lost? Suppose he had let Crawford go ahead with the disclosure, would he have really discovered anything?

Norman was inclined to think not, for, in spite of Molly Todd's warning, and the suspicious circumstances that seemed to lend color to it, he was still

skeptical that any actual dirty work was afoot.

What could the county commissioners do? He reiterated the argument he had put to her. What could anybody do?

"The terms and specifications had been regularly advertised as required by law, and bids asked for upon them. And the funds had been duly appropriated. Inevitably the contract must go to the lowest responsible bidder.

As for Crawford's angry intimations that he had the thing fixed, Norman classed that contemptuously as mere brag and bluster, on a par with the bunk the fellow had got off regarding his expectations with Blair & Co.

"Banana oil!" scoffed Norman. "He can't tell me that J. P. Blair is going to retire and put a false alarm like that in his place, even if the blow-hard does happen to tie up with Gladys. And this Los Chicos talk he was spouting is the same brand of hot air."

That ought to have settled it, and allowed him to go to sleep. But unfortunately certain uneasy doubts kept intruding. Suppose that Molly was right after all; that Crawford had not been merely shooting hot air; that, through some shenanigan, he did lose out on the contract?

Zowie! He could not let himself even contemplate such a calamity. Only over his dead body should it be done, he declared fiercely. But this meant that nothing must interfere with his being present to-morrow when the award was made.

He began to worry on this score. What if something should prevent his getting to Rio Rita on time? What if the train should be late in the morning; or— Oh, pshaw! He turned over fretfully on his pillow, and tried counting sheep.

Finally, after what seemed interminable hours, he drifted off, and fell into such profound slumber that he knew nothing more until he was awak-

ened by the sunlight streaming in at the window and shining into his eyes.

Blinkingly he groped under the pillow for his watch, and glanced at it. Then he gave a gasp.

Twenty minutes to nine! And the train for Rio Rita left at seven thirty.

He hustled into his clothes, and descended to the office, breathing fire and fury.

"Why wasn't I called?" he demanded savagely.

"You were, Mr. Rich," suavely lied the clerk. "I sent the boy up twice to knock at your door, and he says that each time you told him you were just getting up. Probably you were only half awake when you spoke. Sorry."

There was no way to controvert it, although Norman was positive nothing of the kind had happened. He made up his mind that hereafter he would never travel without an alarm clock. Still that didn't help him in his present predicament.

"Is there any chance of getting another train to Rio Rita?" he questioned.

The clerk shook his head.

"Not until three eighteen this afternoon."

"Well, then, I'll have to have a car. I can hire one, I suppose?"

The clerk looked dubious.

"I don't know about that," he hesitated. "The only one for rent here at the junction was taken by Mr. Crawford last night, and it hasn't got back yet."

"But, good Lord!" Norman broke out. "There must be some way. I've got to get to Rio Rita before noon, I tell you."

"Well, the only thing I can see," offered the clerk indifferently, "is for you to pick up a ride with somebody that's driving over there. If I hear of any one going that way this morning I'll let you know, Mr. Rich."

This seemed a pretty slim reliance on which to depend; and Norman was still vainly bedeviling the clerk in the

effort to elicit some less haphazard suggestion when the station agent, with his cap askew on his head, came running in from the plaza, and pushed breathlessly up to the desk.

"Get hold of Doc Barrow right away, will you, Frank?" he panted excitedly. "And tell him to come over to the station. Terrible wreck on the branch. Number Twenty-seven went over White Horse Cliff out on Hairpin Cañon."

"White Horse Cliff!" the clerk exclaimed as he sent a boy scurrying to find the physician. "Good gosh! There can't be anybody left alive."

"Can't tell yet." The station agent gave a hunch of the shoulders. "All I know is that they wired us to send all the doctors and first-aid supplies we can lay our hands on. We're hooking up the switch engine to a baggage car now to shoot out there as a relief train."

"I guess it must be pretty bad, though." He hesitated a moment, then leaned confidentially toward the clerk, and lowered his voice. "There was three carloads of dynamite in that train, Frank, that was being smuggled against regulations over to Rio Rita for blasting work on the new dam. If that went off—good night!"

He hurried away then, and the clerk turned back to Norman.

"Looks like you were lucky after all, Mr. Rich," he said, "when you didn't wake up for that train."

"You mean that this train was the one I would have taken?" Norman stared at him, startled.

"Sure. Number Twenty-seven on the branch. It's a mixed passenger and freight. And if she went over White Horse Cliff, I don't see any use in sending a relief train. It's a sheer drop of over four hundred feet."

He started then to tell of a railroad wreck in which he had once been himself. But Norman gave him scant attention. He was struggling with an idea which had just occurred to him.

"Where is this White Horse Cliff?" he broke in irrelevantly upon the recital.

"About six miles from Rio Rita. But, as I was telling you, Mr. Rich, the engineer, he—"

"Do you suppose they'd let me on that relief train?"

"Can't say, I'm sure." The clerk spoke stiffly; no one likes to have his pet narrative mangled by interruptions. "You could ask the station agent."

Norman waited for no more. Grabbing up his bag, he hurried out of the hotel and across the plaza to the railroad station.

The clerk gazed after him disapprovingly.

"And that's all a tragedy, where maybe sixty people's been killed, means to you," he muttered. "Just a chance for a free ride."

But that only showed how little the clerk knew. Norman was more deeply affected by the disaster than the other dreamed. It had just flashed upon him that Molly Todd was on that wrecked train. Or, at least, she had said in her note that she would meet him aboard it.

Dashing up to the station, he found the relief train just about ready to pull out, and flung himself on it, without asking leave of any one—which was perhaps just as well, since permission would probably have been refused.

As it was, in the rush and bustle of starting he somehow passed unnoticed, and after the train got under way there was no longer any question of his remaining for the trip. He was simply accepted by the party of doctors, newspaper men and railroad officials as one who had a right to be among them.

Neither did Norman pay any attention to them. Crouched back in a corner, he sat, white-lipped and tense, watching the telegraph poles go flashing past, and praying for all he was worth.

The relief train was scheduled to run the forty miles to the wreck right

through without stop and at top speed. As a matter of fact, the distance was covered even faster than had been hoped.

But to Norman, tortured by anxiety, the journey seemed to consume centuries. He could hardly believe it was only eleven o'clock when they finally arrived at the scene of the wreck.

It was a terrifying enough spectacle in all conscience—the tracks torn up for a quarter of a mile where they ran along the edge of the cañon, and cars tossed hither and thither over the right of way. But, as is so often the case in such affairs, the first reports of the disaster had been vastly exaggerated.

What had really happened was that the train had broken in two on a steep grade about a mile back. The engine with the two forward cars had put on extra speed to avoid collision, and had passed safely over the dangerous spot at the edge of the cliff, but the uncontrolled rear section, steadily gathering momentum, had crashed there, and the bulk of it now lay a mass of wreckage in the bed of the cañon four hundred feet below.

It happened, though, that none of the passenger coaches had been among those which went over, although one of them hung perilously halfway over the brink. But all its occupants had been rescued in safety, and, except for one or two cases of fractured bones, no injuries had been sustained more serious than minor cuts and contusions.

All this Norman learned as he hurried hither and thither trying to gather some information in regard to Molly. But her name was not among the list of the injured, nor, so far as he could discover, had any one seen her among the passengers either before or after the accident.

It was presently borne in upon him that his fears in regard to her had been without basis. Like him, she must have failed to take the ill-fated Number Twenty-seven.

Then, as panic gave way to a sense

of relief, and he began once more to take account of his own affairs, he realized almost with a shock that his solicitude for Molly had accomplished what otherwise would have seemed an impossibility.

Here he was at Rio Rita—or practically so—and it still lacked half an hour to noon.

His spirits soared. Only six miles. Why, of course, it could be done. He began hustling around, making inquiries.

But the luck which had followed his steps up to this time seemed now to desert him. So far as any way of getting to Rio Rita before noon presented itself he might as well be at the junction.

The passengers from the wrecked train, it appeared, had all been transported to town before his party arrived; and now nobody was going in that direction.

When any of the busy railroad men engaged in clearing the right of way and replacing the torn-up track would interrupt his labors long enough to answer Norman's questions, it was only to tell him shortly that about all he could do was to hoof it.

Hoof it? Over six long miles of rough mountain trails, or else hopping the ties; and only a scant half hour to do it in.

But at last, just as all hope seemed to have fled, a bearded settler, drawn by curiosity to visit the wreck, rode up on a calico pony; and Norman, ready to chance anything in the emergency, made a speedy dicker for the use of his mount.

It was an exorbitant price the fellow charged him, but there was no time to haggle. Norman tossed him the money, and, seizing the reins, clambered a bit awkwardly into the saddle.

The pony was a wicked-eyed, hard-mouthed mustang; and Norman's horseback riding hitherto had been confined almost entirely to the wooden steeds of the merry-go-round.

Nevertheless, where there's a will, there's a way. The little beast could go, and that was the main thing desired.

Heading him up the track, and urging him into a gallop, Norman streaked away, his long legs hunched up from the stirrups almost to his ears, his bag, fastened around his waist, bumpety-bumping on the saddle behind him.

Hope revived once more in his breast. He had twenty minutes still left until noon, and the pony was not only fast but surefooted. Over the uneven ties it sprinted with never a stumble, and clawed across a couple of short trestles like a cat.

Then the rails curved around to the side of the highway, and prospects looked still brighter. On the road's smoother surface even speedier time could be made. As Norman debouched to it, he saw a sign post which informed him that Rio Rita was only four miles away.

Behind him he could hear the roar of a motor car which was evidently coming toward him at a terrific pace. Merely a faint hum on the air as he turned into the highway, its noise was now a steadily rising crescendo of ear-splitting sound, for the muffler was wide open.

"Gosh! But these Western people do certainly drive," thought Norman, discarding a half-formed notion of hailing the motorist and asking for a lift the rest of the way to town. Useless. Even if the driver comprehended and acceded to his request, that racing car would be a mile down the road before it could be stopped.

And then it struck him that the automobile was slowing down. Perhaps, after all, he could get aboard it, and arrive at the courthouse in more dignified fashion than on his absurd little mount. He turned his head to judge of the prospects.

Fatal inadvertence! The pony which had carried him so gallantly up to this time, either sensing his purpose and re-

sending such ingratitude, or else possessed by a demon perversity, suddenly gave a couple of crow-hops, spread-eagled, and landed Norman flat on his back in the middle of the roadway.

Then, with a snort of disdain, the malicious, particolored little brute turned tail and galloped off homeward.

The tumble from its back wasn't far enough to do any great harm; but as Norman sat up, shaken and disheveled, he almost wished he had broken his neck.

For the car which had been speeding so furiously in his wake, and which now slid to a halt beside him under pressure of its squealing brakes, was the same shining roadster that had bumped him over at the junction, and at the wheel sat Molly Todd herself.

Was she never to see him except sprawled out in the dust, or otherwise as a figure of ridicule?

Blushing, humiliated, ready to sink into the ground with mortification, he could not lift his shamed eyes to her face.

But Molly Todd paid no heed to his confusion.

"Jump in here!" she cried commandingly. "They're gypping you on that contract, and you haven't a second to lose. When I found you weren't on the train I started for Los Chicos Junction to try and get hold of you; and I've been clear there and back.

"Jump in!" she repeated; and so forceful was her tone that she stirred Norman out of his slump and into almost as much of a fever of activity as she was showing herself.

As he sprang into the seat beside her she glanced at the jeweled watch on her wrist.

"Four minutes to twelve. We can make it," she announced confidently, and stepped on the gas.

Then as she hurled the car along she explained the situation to him in jerky sentences.

"They're playing a flimflam game,"

she said, "just as I warned you. This Crawford, realizing that he had no chance to underbid you, got them to change the proposition.

"The commissioners held a secret meeting and altered the specifications so as to provide for pumps of a thousand gallons less capacity, and then re-advertised for bids on that basis in a little obscure country paper that nobody ever sees. Crawford was the only one who knew about it, and of course there will be no other bid but his put in."

"But—but they can't do that," expostulated Norman incredulously. "Pumps of a thousand gallons less capacity will never furnish the water required. I figured on the very lowest possible—"

"What do those crooks care for that?" Molly interrupted impatiently. "It's their graft they are looking out for.

"And the nature of the contract is not what matters now," she snapped. "That can be straightened out afterward. What they have done is all legal enough, my lawyer says, and the only way to beat them is by submitting a lower bid."

"Submitting a lower bid?" Norman stammered. "Why, Miss Todd, it took me a week to get up the one I submitted."

"Maybe?" She bit the word off ironically. "But it isn't going to take you a week, is it, merely to scratch out the old pump capacity in your bid and to put in the new figures? That's all you'll have to do except to change the total charge.

"And you don't need to be extra careful on that score, for be sure Crawford named an amount high enough to cover a sweet lot of graft.

"How long will it take you," she questioned anxiously, "just to make those changes?"

"About fifteen seconds," answered Norman, catching something of her infectious spirit.

"All right, then. We'll beat them," cried Molly Todd, and sent the indicator of her speedometer up another notch.

But the hands of the clock had also been advancing, and it was now only a minute to twelve.

They were within the town limits by this time, though, and racing at unabated speed up the main street. The domed cupola of the courthouse loomed just ahead.

And then a big, slow-moving truck lumbered out right in their path. Molly had to jam her brakes down hard and come to a full stop to avoid crashing into it.

Before she could get going again and swerve around the obstacle, the slow strokes of the town clock began to toll twelve.

One, two, three— They were in front of the courthouse now, and Norman was springing out to the curb. A group of Molly's adherents, headed by Big Bill Davis, pressed around him and began hurrying him up the steps.

But it was too late. Out the door of the building came Crawford with an air of jaunty triumph. He grinned as he saw his belated rival, and significantly patted his breast pocket to show that he had landed the contract.

That grin faded, though, as an angry growl arose from the forty or more determined looking men of Molly's party who were mounting the steps; and the faces of Fenton, Creel and Thornley in the doorway behind him paled visibly.

Big Bill Davis turned impetuously to Molly.

"By golly, ma'am, are you going to let 'em get away with it?" he demanded, dropping his hand to a bulge under his coat which looked suspiciously like the butt of a forty-five. "We all know it's a crooked deal. So, if you say the word, Miss Molly, we'll make 'em change it."

What might have happened then is hard to say. Molly's face was set, her

eyes blazing. But before she could answer yes or no there came a clatter of hoofs along the street, and a man on a foaming horse dashed up to the courthouse.

"Get together, men!" he shouted, waving his arms. "The Bridger County folks is raiding the dam!"

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE IN THE DAM.

LIKE mist before a breeze, the crowd disappeared.

One moment the courthouse steps had been jammed with an angry, buzzing swarm of Molly's adherents; the next, the place was swept clean, and Norman left standing there alone.

Blinking dazedly, he saw Molly, Big Bill Davis, the entire crew vanishing in an excited rush toward the imperiled dam; while a straggling troop of other citizens, aroused by the news, hurried past in an effort to catch up with them.

Since the whole village seemed to be on the move, it struck him as a little queer that Fenton, Thornley and Creel, the three commissioners, did not join them. Instead, they ducked hastily back into the courthouse, and drew Crawford inside with them.

Still Norman didn't really give any consideration to the circumstance. He was too overwhelmed with a sick sense of defeat to pay much heed to anything.

Caught by the contagion of the thing, he had started involuntarily to follow the others on the step as they hotfooted it away; but he had only taken a step or two before he checked the impulse.

After all, it was none of his funeral. Bridger County, or Los Chicos; irrigation, or no irrigation; what did any of it mean to him now? He had lost the contract.

His firm—the recollection of it settled down on his spirit like a pall—was

not paying him to engage in local squabbles, or expose corruption, but to sell goods.

Fool that he was, he had led the house to believe that this Los Chicos contract was as good as his, except for the mere legal formalities required.

And now what would they think of him? No use to bellyache about graft. Orders, not excuses, were what they wanted; and all they would see in the situation was that he had once more fallen down.

Not much doubt, either, about what they would do. He had been given to understand in almost so many words that this was his last chance to redeem his sorry record of failure.

Well, he told himself, nothing gained by kibitzing around over it. He might as well know where he stood, and have it over with.

So, with much the feeling of a man who is signing his own death warrant, he trudged heavily across the street to the telegraph office, and wired a report to his house that the contract had gone to Blair & Co. of Detroit.

Just the bare fact—he was too proud to add any explanation—and a request for instructions.

Then, having told the lone girl left in the place that he would come back later for the answer, he went out again into the blazing New Mexican sunshine.

The telegraph girl had advised him that it would probably take two or three hours to transmit his message and receive a response; and in the meantime he didn't know what to do with himself. If he hung around the village he was almost certain to encounter Crawford, and have to listen to a lot of exultant taunts. In his present mood Norman did not trust himself to submit to much of that sort of thing. Why add to his difficulties by being jailed for a scrap?

Better to avoid trouble, he decided, and put in the interval by following the rest of the community out to the

dam and seeing what the reported raid amounted to.

It was a familiar trail to him—a walk of four or five miles which he had often covered when down here before, studying the irrigation problem—and, engrossed in his none too pleasant thoughts, he strode along at a good rate of speed.

But he had not accomplished more than half the journey before he began to meet groups of returning citizens, and presently Molly herself came along in her roadster.

She drew up at the sight of him, and beckoned him over to the side of her car.

"It was a trick," she explained bitterly, as he asked her in regard to the attack on the dam. "Only a fake demonstration by a handful of hoodlums, whom the men at work there had no difficulty in chasing away. The thing was all over long before we got around. To think"—she gave a short, disgusted laugh, "that I should have let myself be taken in by such a frame-up!"

But Norman, in his thick way, was unable to get her meaning.

"Frame-up?" he repeated vaguely. "But I don't exactly see the idea. What had the Bridger County people to gain by—"

"Not the Bridger County people," she interrupted impatiently. "Don't you understand? It was that gang at the courthouse. They were frightened.

"My ranch manager had warned them to look out for fireworks, if they tried to pull anything off-color. So they staged this show with a hired bunch of Bridgerites, in order to create a diversion and break up our protest. And we, like a lot of idiots, swallowed the bait whole.

"Why, just to show our brainlessness, none of us had ever seen before that Paul Revere who came riding up to give the alarm; yet we took his word without a question.

"Never mind, though." Her lips tightened. "This contract business is not over by a long shot. We'll beat them yet, Mr. Rich."

But Norman failed to rise to her encouragement.

"No." He shook his head slowly. "Might as well face facts, Miss Todd. We've lost.

"I guess the trouble is," he went on after a moment's pause, "you picked a lemon when you tried to work with me. Everything I try to do seems to go wrong. I can't even make the old adage, 'A fool for luck,' run true. I am a fool, and at the same time the unluckiest devil on earth."

He spoke with an effort at lightness, but Molly could see the quivering of his sensitive lips under the smile he forced to them. He was so game in the face of defeat, so ready to assume all the blame of their failure, that she could not help but admire him.

"I won't listen to you!" she cried warmly. "Surely you're not throwing up the sponge, Mr. Rich? Why, this is only the first round. As for me, I have just begun to fight.

"And don't tell me that I picked a lemon for an ally," she sought to comfort him. "No one can be blamed for losing against stacked cards. And now that you know the kind of vermin you are dealing with, you'll make a lot better showing.

"No; we're in this thing together, Mr. Rich." She thrust out her hand impulsively to clasp his. "And we're going to fight it out as we've started, shoulder to shoulder. We'll fight it that way, and we'll win."

Norman's dejected shoulders lifted slightly under the spur of her plucky courage.

"You think, then," he questioned, "that there is a chance of this rotten deal being overturned? Did your lawyer give you any intimation of that sort when you consulted him?"

"We'll, no," she admitted. "In fact, he said that the only way it could be

done was by showing proof of definite fraud; and that of course is practically impossible. Those brigands have been too long at the game not to know how to cover their trail.

"But"—she snapped her fingers as she saw Norman's face fall again—"what do lawyers know, anyhow? Listen to their advice, and you'd never go out of the house for fear it might rain. What I always say is, that there are more ways of trapping a weasel than by serving it with writs of mandamus.

"But it's no use discussing ways and means now, Mr. Rich. I want a little chance to think first, and so, I guess, do you. Then we'll have a conference, go into the situation, and map out a plan of campaign. Can I drive you back to town with me?"

But Norman declined the offer. Since he was out for a walk, he told her, and had already come so far, he felt he might as well keep on to the dam. So, with a cheery "Au revoir" and a wave of the hand, she drove off, and he trudged on along the trail.

The little glow of revived hope which talking to her had engendered, quickly flickered out. Maybe she meant what she said, but it sounded more as if she were merely letting him down easy.

And even if she did intend to contest the fraudulent contract, why kid herself with the notion that any advantage would accrue to him? No; so far as he was concerned this Los Chicos business was done and settled.

By the time she got ready to do anything, he would be far away from there, and absorbed in entirely different interests. His firm, even if he had made good elsewhere, would never dream of keeping him kicking his heels around Rio Rita on so vague a speculation.

Seized with a sudden impulse to get away from the whole distasteful mess, he checked his steps and half turned back toward the village. But a glance

at his watch told him that it was still much too soon to expect an answer to his telegram; and the possibility of a run-in with Crawford while waiting for it recurred as an objection.

After a moment's hesitation, he headed on again in the direction on which he had started. As the ground now began to slope down toward Hairpin Cañon he involuntarily struck into a swifter gait.

Presently the sounds of a feverish activity were borne to his ears, the chattering of steam drills, the pound of rock crushers, the wheezing of donkey engines, the shouts of a small army of men, all warning him that he was approaching the scene of operations.

This dam which was being constructed across the bend in the cañon, and shortly above the point where the cars of the wrecked train had tumbled that morning, was, of course, a part of the general irrigation system, intended to provide a reservoir for the storage of the required water.

But it was a separate matter from the pumping plant which Norman had hoped to install, the subject of an entirely different contract. Consequently, his interest in it was purely academic.

Still he could tell from the sounds which came to him that the work must be considerably advanced, and was eager in a way to see what had been accomplished since he was there before.

A few steps farther, and then rounding the shoulder of a slight eminence, he came out upon the brink of the cañon.

Below him lay a great bowl-shaped excavation alive with energy and power in a hundred different forms. Monster cranes were swinging their long arms back and forth, picking up and carrying from place to place the load of tons as easily as a child might lift one of its building blocks.

Steam shovels were biting away great mouthfuls from the mountain-side. Every once in awhile, heralded

by the waving of red flags, would come the dull booming of a blast.

Men were scurrying about like ants, engaged in a multiplicity of tasks—long lines of them pushing wheelbarrows in a rhythmic progression, others manipulating the various machines, swinging out on slender cables, delving, tugging, hauling in unison and at the word of command.

This was not to be an epochal dam—one of those that are pictured in the news reels of the movies, and in the feature sections of the papers. But even so, it was a titanic work, and in spite of his engrossing worries, Norman got a thrill out of watching the disorderly order spread out below him, the buzz and hum and stir of it all.

Standing there on the edge of the pit, he could appraise the progress of the work. Already the concrete foundations of the great, retaining wall were beginning to rise. Out of the confusion and dust and clangor beneath him, he could visualize the completed achievement, with that trickling stream which now ran like a silver thread down through the valley, turned into a wide, spreading lake behind the white, man-made barrier, solid as the eternal rock.

Then, as he studied the situation, a little wrinkle crept into his forehead and extended down between his eyes. He either was not seeing straight, or else something was wrong.

Surely the base of the dam was not so broad as it had been shown in the blue prints on which he had figured when he submitted his bid for pumping machinery. Also, unless his memory deceived him, the direction of it had been somewhat changed.

Norman hesitated a moment; then on an impulse started to descend into the excavation, scrambling recklessly down the rough rock walls, and essaying a perilous flight of swaying ladders.

Reaching the bottom, he made his way over to the dam, and choosing a completed section of the foundation,

unostentatiously paced off the breadth of it.

He was right. The foundation was four feet narrower than the measurements given in the blue prints. This meant that for the height planned, the dam was no longer within the limits of safety.

What was the idea? The men in charge ought to know what they were doing. Yet any one with even an elementary knowledge of engineering must realize that so slender a dam as would have to rise from that foundation could never serve to hold back the pressure of such a body of water.

There was graft in the change, of course, but where? With the county commissioners? With the people who held the contract? Or with the subordinates in actual charge of the work?

And to what advantage; since whoever was responsible must be aware that the water would no sooner be turned in than the flimsy construction would give way, creating a terrible disaster, and covering everybody concerned in it with obloquy and loss.

It was a case like that of a man committing a crime with the absolute certainty that he is going to be found out and punished for it.

Norman was disquieted by his discovery. He tried to tell himself that the affair was none of his business. Probably, within a day or two he would be gone from Los Chicos County forever; what happened there after that would be of slight consequence to him.

But he could not dismiss the matter so lightly from his mind. Painstakingly exact himself, the thing irritated him in the same way that the sight of a dusty table top will irritate a careful housekeeper.

He wanted to find out what was at the bottom of it. Such a marked discrepancy from the original plans could hardly be the result of a blunder or miscalculation, he felt. And yet—some funny things do happen in construction work.

Checking over his measurement of the foundation once more so as to avoid any possibility of mistake, he left the dam, and strolled over to the little shack which served as the contracting company's office.

Introducing himself to the foreman in charge, and explaining that he was merely looking around, he fell to discussing various phases of the job, and complimenting the foreman on the manner in which certain obstacles had been overcome.

Norman, as has been said, was shy and diffident in conversation. But here he was right in his own field, chatting with some one who talked his language, and before long he and the foreman were on quite clubby terms.

He touched on different subjects connected with the work, but carefully refrained from any comment on the dam itself.

Finally, though, as if it had just occurred to him, he gazed out at the piece of foundation he had measured, and squinted up his eyes.

"Aren't you cutting that base pretty slim for a dam of such height?" he questioned.

"What do you mean, height?" returned the foreman.

Norman named the figures he had used in his calculations on the pumping plant.

"Oh, you are going by the old specifications," said the foreman. "Didn't you know that had all been changed? We are only making the dam a hundred and seven feet now, and of course we are narrowing the base in proportion."

"A hundred and seven feet?" Norman stared at him incredulously. "But that will never—"

He caught himself up, turning the exclamation of protest he had been about to voice into a cough.

"Why did they make the change?" he asked, when he had cleared his throat.

"Search me," the foreman replied. "All I know is, that after the contract

was let, and we'd actually begun on the work, the county commissioners came to the boss and got him to cut down the height of the dam."

"But don't they know," frowned Norman, "that they'll never get enough water that way to irrigate a foot of Los Chicos County? It would be all right for the other side of the cañon, where the slope is lower, or at least for the bench or plateau over there between the cañon and the mountains. But that is across the line, in Bridger County."

"That is the reason why the plans call for that angle in the dam and a high wall over at the far end; so as to prevent the Bridgerites from benefiting by the improvement that Los Chicos County is paying for."

"Angle and high walls?" repeated the foreman. "Say, you're talking ancient history. That's all been cut out, too. We're building the dam straight across now."

Norman could scarcely credit his ears.

"What?" he gasped. "Why, man alive, that simply means that all the Bridger County people will have to do is dig trenches, and gravity, owing to the natural slant of the ground, will carry water from behind that dam to any part of their plateau they want, while Los Chicos County can't get a single drop."

"Surely, those fellows up at the courthouse must know that?" He gave an impatient gesture. "They must certainly remember that the big engineering problem in connection with this proposition was to raise the water to a level that would supply the higher terrain on this side of the cañon, and at the same time prevent that water from flowing away to the lower land on the Bridger County side. Have they gone crazy, then, or—"

"Tell me," he broke off to fix a probing glance upon the foreman, "what's back of all this philanthropy toward Bridger County, anyhow?"

The foreman gave an evasive laugh.

"*Quien sabe?*" He hunched up a shoulder. "I'm paid to build this dam as I'm told, brother, not to ask questions about what's to be done with it after it's finished.

"Still"—he leaned toward Norman in a sudden burst of confidence—"I'm free to admit that I never was on a job yet that had quite such a fishy smell to it. You take it from me, there's a fat slice of graft for somebody in all this—"

He halted suddenly as a lumbering, black shadow fell across the brilliant sunlight at the doorway of the shack. A moment later Fenton, the chairman of the board of county commissioners, thrust his head in at the aperture.

"Howdy, Tom," he said in his soft, undertaker's voice. He was one of those oily, homespun rascals who pose as the "peepul's" friend. "Is Mr. Brackett anywhere around?"

"Why, no, Mr. Fenton. He went up to Santa Fe last night, and didn't expect to be back till the first of the week. Meanwhile I'm running the show alone. Anything I can do for you?"

"No. No, thanky, Tom. I just wanted to speak to Brackett. Nothing important, though—nothing that can't wait until—"

He paused abruptly as his glance happened to fall on Norman seated over in the corner. His flabby, somewhat unctuous face hardened with suspicion and a vivid gleam showed in his piggy little eyes.

But it was only for an instant. Then he was his usual benignant, beaming self again.

"Why, howdy, Mr. Rich?" He extended his hand. "This is sure a surprise to find you out here."

"Well, it's something of a surprise to myself," said Norman. "I started out merely to take a short stroll, and, without realizing it, went farther than I intended. Then, since I was here, I thought I might as well look over the

work. And a moment ago I dropped in here to rest before tackling the hike back to town."

He thought it just as well to let Fenton infer that he had had little opportunity for questioning the foreman.

"Well, well!" There was a note of relief in the commissioner's voice. "You sure don't need to bother about that return trip now, Mr. Rich. My car's right here, and I'd certainly be proud to drive you in, if you'll do me the honor of accepting."

Norman saw no reason to decline the offered lift. It seemed about the only return he was due to get for all the arduous, gratuitous work he had performed for Los Chicos County.

Besides, he had an idea buzzing around in his brain which made him eager to get in to Rio Rita without loss of time.

Therefore he expressed his thanks, and followed Fenton out of the shack, and over to the latter's dusty, battered flivver which stood parked a short distance away.

"It ain't much to offer you, I know, Mr. Rich." The commissioner waved a deprecatory hand toward it. But it's the best I can afford.

"You don't get rich," he sighed, "working for the public in a poor little county like Los Chicos—nothing much but hard knocks."

"Lying old hypocrite!" thought Norman. "I'll bet he's grafted enough in the last year to buy a flock of Rolls-Royces."

However, he discreetly kept these reflections to himself. In fact, he had no choice, for the flivver, as it made its way up the steep, rough road out of the excavation, was wheezing and puffing so noisily that he couldn't have made his companion hear him if he had bawled at the top of his voice.

On the level once more, though, it quieted down sufficiently to permit of conversation, and Fenton turned to Norman with an air of sympathetic commiseration.

"I sure do regret, Mr. Rich, that you failed to get that contract. I had looked forward with pleasure, sir, to voting in favor of your bid."

"Fortunes of war," Norman returned with an effort at nonchalance. He wasn't going to let this oily crook gloat over him. "We take those things as they come in my business."

"It's too bad you didn't submit a bid under the revised terms," pursued Fenton.

"I would have, if it hadn't been for a fool truck that got in my way. Lucky truck, for some people, I guess. A hold-up saved by a holdup." Norman could not resist that one sarcastic thrust.

"But, by the way, speaking of those revised terms, Mr. Fenton, you did that, I suppose, on account of the change in the height of the dam? With a reduced reservoir space, you decided, I take it, that you could do with less pumping capacity?"

"Er—yes; something of the sort." Fenton spoke guardedly. "We saw a chance to save money for the taxpayers, and naturally acted on it."

"Just so," agreed Norman. "But what I'm wondering is, whether you decided to change the pumping capacity before you altered the height of the dam, or vice versa."

The commissioner looked a little frightened.

"I—I really couldn't say as to that, Mr. Rich, without consulting the records."

But Norman was certain from his hesitation that the two things were both part of one scheme, and that it had all been hatched out in those conferences with Crawford at Santa Fe.

The official somewhat uneasily changed the subject.

"I suppose, now that the award has been made, you'll be leaving us soon, Mr. Rich?"

"Well, I don't know. It depends on the instructions I receive from my firm. They may want me to stay here and look into things."

"What things?"

"Oh, all sorts of things. Why, for instance, is Los Chicos County putting in an irrigation system for the benefit of the people over on the other side of the cañon?"

The commissioner's cherubic expression suddenly darkened to a black malevolence.

"Mr. Rich"—there was venom in his tone—"if you are planning to stay here and ally yourself with our local trouble-makers, I warn you that you are apt to find the climate unhealthy—as unhealthy as it is going to be hereafter for Miss Milly Todd."

The idea which had been simmering in Norman's brain came boiling to the surface at this hint of danger to Molly. He regretted the curtness of his telegram to his firm.

What he should have done was to explain that he had been flimflammed out of the award by a conspiracy of graft—graft which he was now confident did not stop at the petty takings on one machinery contract, but would run into millions.

Well, it was still not too late. He would send a supplemental message to the house, setting forth the details and strongly urging that he be permitted to stay on at Rio Rita for a couple of weeks to ventilate the corruption and have Crawford's crooked deal overturned.

Then, as Molly had said, he and she would fight it out, shoulder to shoulder.

The flivver was passing the telegraph office at the time on its way down the main street at Rio Rita. Norman laid a quick hand on his companion's arm as an intimation that he wanted to get out.

"Here's where I leave you, Mr. Fenton," he said as the car slowed down. "Thanks for the buggy ride—and the advice."

Then, springing to the ground, he hurried into the clicking telegraph office.

As he entered the door a touch of annoyance came into his expression to see Crawford already there. Could he never shake that evil genius?

But Crawford was at a desk over at one side of the room, absorbed in framing a message which was evidently causing him some difficulty, for he was scowling and biting the pen, and scratching out more words on the blank in front of him than he let stand.

He did not notice Norman. The latter, quite willing to avoid an encounter with him, moved unobtrusively over to a desk out of his line of vision and several feet away.

It did not take him long to draft his telegram. Norman had a gift for comprehensive expression on paper. As he read over what he had writ-

ten, he felt that he had put up a convincing argument to the firm, and one which would probably gain him what he wanted. Then possibly Crawford would find that the shoe was on the other foot.

With a more confident manner he approached the grille and handed in his telegram to be counted.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Rich," said the clerk at the window, "we have a message for you which has just come in."

She handed out the yellow slip of paper, and Norman read it. It was signed by the head of his house, and was short and sweet.

"Your services no longer required," it ran. "Don't send any alibis or requests for reinstatement. This is final."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



A THEATER WHERE EVERY SEAT IS GIVEN AWAY

New York is the greatest theatrical city in the world, containing upward of eighty producing houses. Every week certain Saturday and Sunday newspapers list the shows in the order of their endurance rank, so to speak—that with the longest run heading the catalogue. Since some time in February, when "Broadway" took to the road, this position has been held by "The Ladder," which had its first performance in October, 1926, and has been playing continuously ever since. Next in line comes "Rio Rita," dating from February, 1927. But there is a much bigger difference between the two than the five months separating their metropolitan premières. For most of its career "Rio Rita" has been playing to a five-fifty top, while ever since last Thanksgiving seats for "The Ladder" have been free.

It is now in the fifth of the regular Broadway theaters it has occupied, and is crowded every night. A notice in front of the doors announces that tickets must be procured in person on the day of the performance for which they are desired, not written or telephoned for, and regularly by six o'clock each evening another board replaces the first, setting forth the fact that all seats are gone.

The subject of the play has to do with reincarnation, it is acted by a cast of professional players, and the author bears the same name as the oil man who backs it, although they are no relation to each other. Rumor runs that the producer offered to get it put on for the author, but that one manager whom he approached on the matter laughed at him and said: "Why, you can't give away seats for that play!" He is now showing him that he can do this very thing month in and month out, for at the time of writing there are no signs that the piece will be taken off. All in all, this case of "The Ladder" is the oddest happening in the modern capital of stageland which is New York.



The Respectable Maniacs

By **RICHARD F. MERRIFIELD**

Author of the Albert and Viola stories

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

*A vivid word picture of young married couple life
as it is lived in the age of jazz*

VIOLA was mad; she was sore. Here she wanted to go to the movies to-night—there was one of those sophisticated pictures on, over at the Highlawn Theater, with Raoul di la Bori in "Pink Love"—and Albert had to be late for supper!

She turned out the gas under the chopped beef, clamped the aluminium cover over the large frying pan to keep the meat warm, and left the kitchen. She was hungry, and the meat was

drying up, and the lima beans were boiled down dry; the potatoes, too, were soppy from having been on too long—and all because of Albert's delay.

It was eight o'clock, and he should have been home at seven, or seven fifteen at the latest.

In the front room she rummaged in her black walnut desk, searching for the theater program, which the Highlawn mailed weekly to its patrons. She

wanted to be sure of what was playing to-night.

As she poked in the dark interior, Albert's old photograph book fell out of an obscure pigeonhole. She picked it up, and also the program, which had fallen beside it, then crossed the room to the couch.

In a moment she let the program fall on the floor, and opened the book. There was Albert at the age of six, an ugly little boy in overalls, standing on a tree stump, waving at the camera.

On the next few pages of the black folder were pictures of his sister, his mother, his aunt, and his old school-mates. She could identify only a few. All that part of Albert's life was almost closed to her; all strange and somehow lifeless.

He did not seem to have existed really before she had met and married him. Later pictures of him, though—some of them including her beside him—had more vitality and reality. But he would never be handsome, she reflected, nor husky.

She gazed for a moment at her own picture, and thought vaguely: "What a lot of beauty going to waste!" In the next instant she felt guilty, and told herself with prim modesty that she was not beautiful.

Some of these pictures in the back of the album looked strange to her. She must have missed these pages before. One picture had a whole page to itself, and Viola stopped to look at the girl in that photo. She had light hair; Viola's was dark, and brown.

This girl looked a bit vampish. The tall shadow in the foreground was the shadow of the person who had taken the picture. It had been late in the day, evidently.

Viola studied that shadow; there was something familiar about it. Yes—it was Albert. And the girl—what was she doing, looking at him like that, all smiles?

Viola flipped over the next few

pages disinterestedly, and closed the book.

As she did so, the hall door opened. Albert was home. Viola tucked the album under the couch pillow, and rose. She hoped he would not kiss her to-night. Lately he had been perfunctory in his greetings. Perhaps she had only supposed so, but a supposition, as far as a woman's peace of mind went, was as bad as a fact.

At all events, she had no inclination to hurry out to meet him.

She heard the kitchen door creak, and knew that he was looking in there to see if she was at her cooking. As long as he got his supper, she considered with a pout, he didn't care about anything else. That was his first thought—food. Now he was probably disappointed because she was not toiling in that hot kitchen.

She rose and went down the hall, her features hardening.

"'Lo, Vi," he greeted her in offhand fashion.

Was he going to—was he—no, he was not. He did not kiss her. He was trying to be cheerful about something.

"'Lo,—uh—Al," she answered, and hastened to the gas range, where, with a sudden show of industry and much clatter of pots and dishes, she managed to cover up her tension.

What was the matter with everything to-night? she wondered. Albert was in a strange mood, and so was she.

All day long she had been like this—idling, musing, restless. Things had never been quite right since their return from their summer out on Long Island.

They had planned to move into a nicer section of Brooklyn on their return, and instead they had been forced, because of the expense, to remain where they were, in a section where the suburban atmosphere was swiftly being annihilated by huge boxlike apartment buildings, stores, and an influx of untidy inhabitants.

Albert, in his shirt sleeves and vest, strolled into the kitchen with a tabloid newspaper under one arm. He sat on the white chair beside the cupboard, and settled himself to read and wait for supper to be served.

"Can't read in the subway at all," he complained. "Darned crowd."

"You never complained of that before," she remarked.

He mumbled something and went on reading. Presently she called him to the bountiful spread of lima beans, chopped beef and soppy potatoes.

"Suppose you had to work overtime?" she probed, as they sat down.

He had been leaning forward, surveying the meal with an eye that was not too appreciative. Now he looked up, as if a bit startled.

"Oh, why, no," he answered doubtfully. "No, I didn't work overtime. Say, Vi," he changed the subject, "where'd you find that album?"

"Where'd you see it?" she countered, on her guard at once.

"On the couch, under the pillow."

"Oh!"

She poured his coffee, and the thought flashed through her mind that, dressed to-night in a pink art smock that had become frowzy through continued use as a house dress, she did not look as snappy as that vamp in the album. Was Albert thinking of that, too?

"It was in the desk," she said. "I was looking at it."

"Oh, yeah?"

She scooped three spoonfuls of lima beans onto his plate, and glanced covertly at his face.

"If you hadn't come home so late, we would have gone to the pictures to-night," she observed irrelevantly. "I suppose you stayed late to kid around in the office."

"No, honest. We haven't any girls in our office—not right in my room, at least—"

"Who's talking about girls?" she caught him up.

"Well, you said 'kid around.'"

"You don't always have to kid around with girls, do you? You're no bargain for kidding around with girls, anyway."

Albert swallowed some more coffee and gulped:

"What you drivin' at? What's got into you to-night?"

"Nothing's got into *me*, Albert. What's got into you, may I ask?"

"Me? Holy smoke, nothin'." He looked injured.

"Well, who's that girl in your album, then?" She was going to get this over with right now.

His eyes opened inquiringly.

"Girl?" he asked wonderingly. "I don't know any girl in my album. What's the big idea?"

"Oh, you know, all right. It's been put in there recently."

He shook his head and reached for another meat ball.

"You're cuckoo. I don't know what has got into you." His casual manner was maddening.

"My head's too busy with things you don't understand, Vi," he added.

"I haven't got time to think about that stuff. Like I was saying to George—"

"George? Who's George?"

"You heard me speak of George lots of times. George Archer. He's one of the men at the office."

Viola felt that she was getting at the bottom of things now. She had the intuitive sense that this George was the key to this curious barrier between her and Albert to-night.

There was something portentous in the mention of the name, although she could not remember having heard it before.

"He lives near here," Albert was saying between mouthfuls. "I meet him coming home in the train—we met to-night. Lots of times we come home together. That's nothin', is it?"

That didn't explain matters. As Viola rose from the table, some minutes later, and went slowly into the

front room to rest, she was thinking of several things.

Albert had not kissed her; she had missed the movies to-night; there was a girl in Albert's album, and an unknown individual called George Archer was somehow the key to it all and to her restless mood. It occurred to her that her mood was only a premonition of something that was about to happen.

II.

SEVERAL nights later it rained. Viola had sat at one of the front windows since four o'clock, watching the large drops splashing in the street puddles. The depression in the corner across the way, where the sewer grating was placed, had filled up rapidly.

That grating was always clogged up, and whenever it rained a small mud-colored lake formed there. Small Italian boys would squat on the sidewalk there after the storm and sail their pirate galleons—slats of wood from fruit crates belonging to the public market across the street.

What a storm it was! The street was empty until about five thirty, when people began coming home from their jobs.

They were a strange people to Viola, these folks who went to work in the morning and returned at night. And to-night, as she pressed her nose against the wide pane and watched them scurrying to their drab apartments, protecting their hats with newspapers, she sensed a new barrier between her and her husband.

He belonged to that world of city workers; she to a domestic world. He met many people of whom she never dreamed. He and his associates went about their work with set, pale faces, and talked, in each different office, a different jargon of business.

She pictured Albert sitting at his desk and shuffling papers, making marks with his pen, and talking some cut-and-dried language to those about

him. The same thing went on in countless offices, in countless cities. And all of it was unknown to her, part of another world.

How much the world claimed of him, and how little it left of him to her! His past before she met him—that belonged to himself, to his own memory. His daily life at the office—that, too, was his own.

Yet she, on her part, presided over this little apartment, and met another class of people, the homekeepers, composed of young and old wives, old men who walked solemnly around, their hands behind their backs—and children and shopkeepers. She, too, lived in a strange world, a world apart from Albert's.

How inconceivable that they should try to combine these two worlds, they who were practically strangers to each other.

Her eyes settled on two people who were hurrying across the way, their black silk umbrella tilted against the rain and wind. They crossed the street and tried to find a way over the big puddle near the sewer grating.

When at last they discovered a place where the jumping from the street to the sidewalk was not too wide, the man lifted the girl by the elbows and helped her across. It certainly looked as if he got his feet wet for his pains.

Viola chuckled disdainfully at him. The darn fool! The girl could just as well have jumped unaided.

A shift in the wind tipped over the umbrella, wrenched it from the man's hand—and Viola sprang to her feet, her brown eyes wide and unbelieving. It was not until she had seen the man recover the umbrella and disappear down the street with the girl that Viola muttered wonderingly:

"Why, that was Albert!"

Yes, she told herself, it *was* Albert. But who the dickens was the girl with him?

Where had she seen that bright, pretty face before, and how had Al-

bert ever come to know a girl who dressed like that and looked so modern and chic? Funny; Viola had not been as startled at seeing Albert as she had been at seeing the girl.

That spiffy Fifth Avenue dress, those sheer stockings, with the black line running up the calf, that pert hat, and, above all, the girl's breezy manner, the way in which she had helped Albert get back the umbrella, her lingering touch on his forearm—where *had* Albert met a girl like that?

And where did the dumb-bell think he was going with her? Humph! Chasing off like that and disappearing down the block—

"Well!" exclaimed Viola.

One hand dropped to her hip, and she looked around the front room with a startled inquiry in her expression, as if to say: "What am I doing here, running his house and getting his supper, when he's walking around with snappy looking girls? Wait till he gets home."

When he did get home, there seemed to emanate from her expression and attitude one huge question mark. Albert fussed with a cigarette and scratched his match on every piece of metal in the kitchen before he was successful with it.

When he was finally fortified with an inhalation of smoke, he broke the ice with a vague remark.

"I—I escorted a young lady home in the rain," he informed her.

Viola tried to look haughty and disinterested as she set the table.

"I'm sure I don't care, Albert. Why tell *me* that?"

"Well, I thought maybe you'd seen me—us—and was wonderin'."

She did not answer, although she was aching to shriek at him: "Who is that girl?"

Trying not to look at him, she worked hurriedly about the kitchen.

"Stop getting in my way all the time!" she cried. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"What 're you sore for?" He was just sparring for time.

"Oh, don't bother me!" A meaningless admonition, but indispensable to a wife in a domestic spat.

"Gee, I just offered a girl my umbrella. That's nothin' to get sore about."

Viola stopped the wiping of a large, blue, willow-ware platter, and faced him in exasperation.

"Aren't you the innocent gallant knight, though? You never help *me* across a puddle like that. Why didn't you throw down your good seventeen-dollar overcoat for her highness?"

Albert started to collapse in the white chair, thought better of it and straddled it, his elbows pointing outward on the back. He made a good imitation of a young husband gnashing his teeth.

"You don't know anything about it at all," he told her indignantly. "She's a friend—I mean, an acquaintance of mine."

"Oh, really? How charming." Metaphorical porcupine quills bristled all over Viola.

"She's George Archer's piece-in-law—his wife's niece. I met them in the subway the other night—night I told you I met George."

Viola remembered his telling her about Archer, but she was sure Albert had said nothing about the flapper niece. Why had he concealed that fact until now—until he just had to confess that he knew her?

She did not tell him what she thought, for, after all, perhaps it was best to give him enough rope to hang himself with. Well, she would show him how much she cared.

"She's from the Middle West," added Albert, and it seemed to Viola that, as he said "Middle West," his voice had a catch in it, as if he felt that the Middle West was, because of the girl, the most glamorous land in the whole wide world.

"She doesn't interest me in the

least," she told him, with affected politeness. "I'm sure I don't care whether she is from—from China."

"She was standin' at the station. She's just visitin' the Archers. I came along and offered her the umbrella. Gee, Vi, you shouldn't get sore. You don't have to be afraid that I'm going to fall for some flapper or—"

"Well, I like that!" gasped Viola. "As if I care! Honest, Albert Wade, you flatter yourself."

III.

THE next morning Viola was in the middle of a Saturday morning rush of house cleaning. Every room was upset. The dishes seemed to have piled up to twice their ordinary amount.

The beds were unmade, linens were heaped on the bedroom floor, and the pillows were uncased. The carpets were rolled up, the broom standing against the wall in the hall, and the vacuum cleaner lay on the floor in the front room.

All the curtains on the windows were tucked up out of the way. Rubbish was stacked in a cardboard grocery box in the hall.

And Viola, with a towel around her head, her eyes and nose full of dust, her hands grimy from a long morning of dusting, cleaning and washing, was just about to sit down for a few minutes' rest, when the doorbell rang.

She looked with dismay down at her faded, soiled bungalow apron, and at her hands. But there was no time to primp up. Yet, as she went to the door, she unconsciously touched her fingers to her head, as if to arrange her hair—but her hair was entirely hidden by the towel.

She opened the door and inhaled narcissus perfume. That girl stood there. The nerve of her!

For a brief moment, Viola surveyed her caller. The black silk dress, tight sleeves, the flare bottom of the dress, gunmetal stockings and high French

heels—these items registered swiftly in her mind.

But what caught her attention most was the girl's face. She was seeing her close up now for the first time.

This vision was a blonde, with a boyish bob. A crescent of hair curled piquantly on either side. Her lips were vivid and red, her eyebrows shaped and plucked.

Her eyes were velvety and of the "Let's neck" variety. Mascara lashes helped the effect. The girl certainly knew how to use cosmetics.

While Viola was glancing at the smoked-pearl choker, which was fastened about the girl's neck, she became conscious that this amazing visitor was studying her, Viola, in turn, with a different kind of astonishment, as if to say: "My Lord, is *this* his wife?"

Then Viola grew acutely aware of the difference between them. She, Viola, was all mussed up with housework, and this lady fair, with the smart bob and zippy gown, looked as if she had just stepped out of a motion picture.

If there is anything in the vibration theory, the electrons between them must have been cutting up some awful didoes.

Very likely only a few seconds had passed since Viola had opened the door, just enough time for both young ladies to raise and lower their eyes in swift appraisal, but those brief seconds were surcharged with meaning for Viola.

In reality, she was only registering the idea that this girl was about to mean something important in the life of Albert and herself.

"Oh—why, how do you do?" the girl simpered. "I—I—uh—is Albert in?"

Viola's eyes narrowed and her lips tightened—just a little. The hair at the back of her neck prickled, and seemed to draw her head back, but inside she raged.

But she twisted a side of her lips

into an almost civilized smile, and replied:

"I'm sorry, no. He hasn't come home from work yet. Uh—I'm his wi—Mrs. Wade—his wife, you know."

"Yes, I know," the visitor assured Viola calmly and sweetly. "But he'll be here soon—any minute now?"

In some strange manner this abominable female had got inside the apartment, had closed the door, and was now following Viola to the front room.

At a loss before this bland, breezy manner, Viola heard herself apologizing for the appearance of herself and the flat.

"Don't think about it," her unexpected guest chirruped. "When I'm home I look like the devil—myself. I mean," she added hastily, "the house is upset—when I help to—when I clean."

"Oh, yes?" Viola could not think, for the life of her, of an intelligent answer.

"Yes." The girl settled in the big, leather armchair and crossed her knees. When Albert came home, reflected Viola, the first thing he would see, from down at the end of the hall, would be his girl friend and her knees.

"Mr. Wade," she said, "I mean, Albert, will be here pretty soon now. Won't you make yourself comfortable and wait? I'm just going to straighten up a little. I'm a fright."

"Oh, don't bother, honey. What I really came over for was to borrow a camera. Your husband—Albert—told me—that is, he was kind enough—"

"Oh, yes, I guess so." Viola went to the desk and fished out the camera.

Her eyes lighted on the photograph album, and she wanted to open it and compare the picture with the reality. But the girl was looking.

She handed the vamp the camera and at that moment the hall door opened, and Albert arrived. He came into the room, as soon as he caught sight of the girl, with a bright manner quite out of his natural character.

"Didn't expect you over so early," he greeted her, adding: "You two—I suppose you know—"

"Why, no—" began Viola, a little frigidly.

But the vamp cut in on her with:

"No, and isn't that dumb? Why, Mrs. Wade, we never introduced ourselves."

"This is Miss Rawley," offered Albert.

"Uh—Millicent Rawley," corrected Miss Rawley, pleasantly.

"Miss Rawley?" mumbled Viola, as if she were surprised by the charm of the name, and Millicent answered, with a musical trill:

"Yeh-h-hes."

"This is George Archer's niece, as I told you," added Albert. "You know, the girl—the young lady I took home in the rain."

"I remember seeing *you* that night," responded Viola nicely but pointedly, "but I didn't see Miss Rawley clearly enough to know her again."

She knew they were aware she was lying, but that didn't make any difference; the object was to minify Millicent's appeal.

Then Millicent, her round eyes turning eloquently to include Albert, sprang a new one:

"Uncle George and Aunt Katie want you both over for dinner tomorrow night."

"Oh, no—I—we—" began Viola in panic.

But she had not reckoned with Millicent's superior personal force. Dominating them both, she put across the insistent invitation and had it ratified and accepted before either Albert or his wife could think up a decent excuse. Viola noted that Albert had made but weak objections.

When Millicent—black silk dress, cosmetics, knees and all—had departed like the Queen of Sheba in person, Viola gave her husband a generous section of her mind—which is to say, the very devil.

It was his fault, she remarked caustically, that Millicent had come over and found her looking like a dishrag, and the house like a prize ring stadium after a championship scrap. It was his fault, she continued bitterly, that they were signed up for Sunday evening, when she had been planning other things.

But Albert disclaimed blame for everything, and took a fatalistic attitude.

"Well, we've got to go now, that's one sure thing," he reminded her when he could get in a word. And then he added, a little mischievously: "It 'll be nice anyway. They've got a swell radio, George says, and you can dance with him—while I dance with Milly."

He threw up an arm as if to dodge an imaginary missile, then went to her side impulsively and clapped the arm around her.

"Aw, snap outa it, Pippy!" he cried genially. "C'mon; I'll help to straighten the house, and we'll go to the pictures this afternoon. They're playing 'Pink Love' to-day—Friday and Saturday."

IV.

AT six the next night they were ready. The house had been restored to order; Viola had put on her best dress, resolving to compete as best she could with the devastating Millicent; and Albert, who had innocently—oh, yes—dressed, shaved and combed with exceeding care, stood waiting.

They went down the three flights of their six-family apartment house, and, crossing the street to the corner where the rain puddle had been, found a diagonal street which led away from their own rather unkempt section of public markets and dry goods stores.

The Archer house was one-half of a two-family stucco structure on a tree-lined avenue, in a more suburban part of Bensonhurst.

Viola wondered when she and Albert would ever be able to live in a two-

family stucco house—but, before she could brood on the idea, they were standing on the top of the semicircular red brick steps and ringing the door-bell.

Millicent, arrayed in blue chiffon, admitted them, and Viola thought despondently of the "best" dress she had so hopefully donned—the simple olive gown, with a small border trim and belt of Russian braid.

"Oh, you dears!" caroled Millicent, stretching forth her hands.

Behind her was Kate Archer, George's wife. Viola was relieved as she shook hands with this large, bland female, for Kate was a perfect example of what the irresistible Millicent would be in ten or twelve years. She hoped Albert would see the warning.

It was curious how the characteristics which, in Millicent, were her most charming qualities, were the very things that made Kate what she was. Millicent would fall heir, in the years to come, to those.

Her dazzling white-blond hair would lose its curl and would fall flat and colorless, as had Kate's. Her face, on which her young prettiness hid a real coarseness of feature, would broaden, and instead of being the great big baby doll she was now she would develop into a massive Amazon, like her aunt.

George Archer swaggered forward then, and without waiting for Viola to greet him, put forward a hamlike paw, with hair on the back of the fingers. He shook hands vigorously, and his buck teeth showed in a ridiculous smile of welcome.

"Make yourselves at home, folks!" he roared at them, and preceded them into a parlor that looked like a candy-box wrapper.

He shoved them toward chairs and forced a cigar on Albert.

"Take off your coat, 'Al," insisted this person. "Like me, see? No formality nor nothin' of that kind here, old kid. The ladies don't mind, do you, Kate?"

With one large finger he tapped his shirt, which was checked with small green swastikas. "I like to be comfortable, I do, and I guess you do, too, huh?"

Viola did not like his small jet eyes; they were set too close together. She did not like his build, either, which was that of a gorilla—massive shoulders, long arms, and slightly bowed legs.

She sighed secretly and took off her hat. Millicent took it with affected graciousness. Then they all sat silent and embarrassed for a few moments, until George exploded with a brilliant idea:

"Let's see what's on the air, eh?" He pounded across the room, slapped Albert on the shoulder, and leaned over the young man to tune in a horrible excuse for a radio.

His wife and niece were so politely absorbed in George's hocus-pocus with the set that Viola found a chance to study the awe-inspiring parlor.

A yellow crystal chandelier hung low in the center, its glass pendants all in the shape of half moons. That was enough in itself to damn the place, but Kate and George had gone further.

They had covered the floor with a carpet that looked as if Broadway flips and French frappés had been scattered all over it. They had installed impossible pieces of family furniture in every available spot, and they had desecrated the walls with unspeakable pictures—two enlarged and colored photographs—one showing themselves in wedding costume, George sitting down, with his hands outspread on his knees, and Kate standing proudly beside him, one of her hands resting on her husband's shoulder; the other containing a line-up of themselves in the same costume, with bridesmaids and ushers.

The photographs were inclosed in gilt, oval frames, and were distorted by concave glass. There were other pictures which followed the taste exhibited in the photographs.

George had succeeded in his wres-

ting with the knobs, and execrable music, a jazz orchestra imitating a camel going over a newly plowed field, split the air. Then Kate, who had had ample time to forge an idea on the anvil of her brain, exclaimed:

"Oh, Mrs. Wade, maybe you'd like to see my new dining table."

"I'd love to, I'm sure," replied Viola, as if her life and happiness depended upon the sight of Mrs. Archer's table. But George, looking around from the radio, observed:

"How about the feed bag, momma? I'm starvin', ain't you, Al?"

Kate, however, was not to be stopped, once she got under way. She told George over her shoulder to see that everything was O K in the kitchen, and propelled Viola out of the room by the elbow.

From the dining room, while Viola rhapsodized over the dining-room table, she heard George in the kitchen, and it occurred to her that Albert and Millicent were alone together in the parlor.

She heard Millicent asking Albert if he knew the latest variation of the Black Bottom, and then came the girl's voice, singing jazzily:

"Ya-cha-cha, ma baby's snappee!
Ya-cha-cha, ma baby's wild—"

And there came the sounds of Millicent's heels thumping on the carpet. Half turning, Viola saw, through a gap in the portieres, the vamp's expertly moving feet, and she reflected that once more Albert was aware that the young lady had knees and rolled stockings.

Miss Rawley was doubtless aware of it too, as an explosive expert might be aware of TNT in his hands.

"It's all ready," called George from the kitchen, and Kate stamped out there to serve the food.

Left alone in the dining room, Viola hesitated. The table was set for company, a pretentious array of special silver, glassware—including a large cut-glass bowl of imitation fruit—and

gilt-edged plates. The best tablecloth in the house was spread snow white under the whole arrangement.

Viola hesitated. She did not want to interrupt Albert and Millicent in their dancing, and so appear to them like a jealous little cat of a wife who had to watch her spouse every minute, and yet she knew that if she went in the other direction, to the kitchen, Kate, although apparently objecting, would let her help serve the food, guest or no guest.

George solved her momentary difficulty by coming in and leading her off into an awkward fox trot. They danced in through the portières, and, as Viola was swung around by the gorilla, she saw Albert and Millicent off in one corner, going through preposterous contortions.

Albert was making a fool of himself, trying to do the latest variation of that crazy dance, and Millicent, half bent over, was clapping her hands and tapping her feet and swaying from side to side like an African native in a sacrificial stunt.

Then something went wrong with the radio, and at the same moment Kate called hoarsely from the dining room that dinner was ready. They all filed back through the curtains.

A leg of lamb, roasted, was steaming on a platter in the center of the table. Baked sweet potatoes were heaped in a bowl. Gravy, in an ornate pitcher, stood near the meat, and there was spinach in another bowl, almost overflowing.

George sat down first. He was still coatless. With his elbows spread on the table, he looked big enough to eat up the meat himself. His large wife sat down at his left and began to carve.

"Sit beside me, Mrs. Wade," invited Kate, gesturing with the carving knife. She still had her apron on, and her broad face was flushed from bending over the range in the hot kitchen.

Viola obeyed, and sat down primly, her hands in her lap. It may have been

a mere chance that caused Albert and Millicent to be placed together on the other side—Viola was not sure.

Albert looked nervous, yet pleased, and Millicent, amazingly bold about her liking for him, mothered him by helping him to the spinach and sweet potatoes. Viola was served last.

"Gravy, Al-bert?" cooed Millicent. "Mrs. Wade, you've got the sweetest hubby; he eats everything!"

Viola smiled like an idiot, hating herself and everything, and wishing that she could yank Miss Rawley's crescent curl that curved over her ear.

"Bread, Al-bert?" asked Millicent.

"D'yuh like the first cut, Mr. Wade?" Kate wanted to know.

Oho! So both of them were trying to be attentive to Al. Hmph! Viola cast down her eyes and inserted her fork into a sweet potato with a malicious, murderous pleasure—as if it were the potato's fault.

All through that horrible meal she was forced to disregard politely Albert's popularity with these two acquisitive females. George, burrowing deep in his heaped-up plate, seemed oblivious to it all. The conversation was all directed at Viola's husband, and she felt herself out in the cold.

It was the same way after dinner, when Millicent and Albert hilariously cleared off the table, and Kate took Viola upstairs to admire the rooms. George left the house to buy cigars.

Surely it was all done deliberately, this segregation of Albert and Milly. Viola, as she watched it happen again and again during the evening, could not feel that it was coincidence each time.

And so it was that, upstairs there with Kate, her ears strained for sounds of the laughter downstairs, and she pictured the two dancing, flirting—and necking, perhaps.

"Don't these people realize that I'm his wife?" she asked herself. "Doesn't that mean anything to them? I wonder what they take me for?"

Downstairs again, after the dishes had been cleared away and they were all gathered in the gaudy parlor once more, George, who had returned, turned on the radio. At the start of the music Albert looked meaningly at Viola, and started toward her to dance with her. But Kate broke in with:

"Oh, Milly, do that Black Bottom thing you and Mr. Wade were doing!"

Cold all over, Viola sank back in her chair. Willingly, Milly grasped Albert's arms and they clumped around the carpet, while the air was filled with their:

"Ya-cha-cha, ma baby's snappee!
Ya-cha-cha, ma baby's wild—"

Then Kate rose and gave a ludicrous imitation of it with George. Millicent stood near to coach them, and hung onto Albert's arm as if she needed support while she was convulsed with laughter.

Viola, sitting in the deep chair, was a far-away spectator of the fun. She wore a perpetual smile.

Her eyes did tricks to her; all the objects in the room seemed to be receding, as if she were looking at them through the small end of an opera glass. Even the people looked like marionettes.

She felt that she ought to get up and try to dance with them, but, for the life of her, she couldn't bring herself to do it.

Just when she thought that the terrible evening was over, George suggested ice cream, and Kate insisted that Albert and Millicent chase after it to the drug store several blocks away. Viola's mind instantly checked the memory of those blocks leading to the drug store; they were dark blocks, with very few street lamps.

Yet she could not protest, could not say anything. Albert objected mildly, but was ruled down by these three invincible people.

While they were gone George tinkered with the radio, and Kate

stretched out on a couch, dozing. Desperate, Viola tried to interest herself in a magazine, then in the radio, and finally in the choice masterpieces on the walls.

It seemed ages before Milly and Albert returned, bearing with them a quart of ice cream.

They burst into the front door, Albert holding the package aloft. He dropped it on the floor, and when he and the girl bent to pick it up their heads met. More laughter, with Kate, her interest in life revived, sitting on the couch and snickering.

"You two fix it," she ordered them.

The radio blared forth again, and Kate, suddenly aware of Viola's existence, yanked her into a dance. It was like dancing with a ten-ton truck. Viola followed the steps for a few turns, her feet stumbling and dragging as she was whirled around, and finally had to give it up with the plea that her breath was gone.

"Say, Mrs. Wade," said Kate, "do yuh know any good beauty parlors around here? I tried that one on Fletcher Street, but that ain't no good, y' know."

"You mean Lena's Shoppe?" asked Viola dully.

"Yeah." Kate's hand flopped to show her dislike for Lena's. "That Lena—aw she always talks about people. Y' can't get a word in edgeways when she gets talkin'. She's terrible, honest. Five minutes you're there, and she's got everything outa you. I'm livin' in this house a year now, and I'm tellin' yuh, I'd rather go as far as Eighty-Sixth Street before I'd go to Lena's. She's that way, y' know."

"I don't know of any—" began Viola doubtfully.

"Well, this is how it is, y' see. Milly wants her hair done, and me, too. I heard of a place near the new theayter where the prices is nice. You and me and Milly could go to-morrow, yeah?"

"I don't think—" But again Viola was overruled.

Milly bounced into the discussion, her eyes wide and sparkling, and insisted, just insisted, that Viola go with them. They could shop afterward, and then Viola could come back to this house for supper to-morrow night; and Albert, instead of going home from work, could come with George straight here, and they'd all have another good time.

George bellowed his hearty seconding of the idea, and Viola and Albert wilted under the positive insistence of these three barbarians.

And so it was agreed, and Viola and Albert were allowed to go home to recuperate before the next session with the respectable maniacs.

V.

MONDAY, to Viola, meant a day of washing and of paying household bills. Every moment the doorbell seemed to ring—the insurance bill, the milk bill, the bakery bill, the meat bill, payments on the vacuum cleaner and patent ironing board, and what not.

It also meant that she was queen again in her castle, for Albert, like millions of other husbands, was out of the house and at work. But this Monday was different from others. To-day she was to meet Milly and Kate on the corner and go shopping.

She dreaded the experience, yet looked forward to it a little, as something that would lift her out of her routine. So she hurried through the morning's work—which consisted of picking up and restoring to their proper places the things her husband had disturbed during his week-end; his neckties, collars, newspapers and cigarettes.

Fortunately most of the collectors called in the morning, and she felt freer to go out. She took one last look around the place at the appointed hour and slipped into the bedroom to dress.

Three-quarters of an hour later she surveyed herself in the mirror. She was dressed in a tan gown, peasant

sleeves, and a short, pleated skirt. Hastily she donned her plaid fall coat, adjusted her fox-fur collar, turned again to the mirror to pull her tan, helmetlike hat down over her dark-brown hair, gave a last touch to her nose with a powder puff, and went to the door.

There, with a preliminary glance down at her tan-silk stockings and shoes, she hustled out of the apartment and to the corner.

Kate and Milly were waiting on the corner near the drug store—Milly looking ultra-trig in a close-fitting black-satin coat trimmed with monkey fur; Kate mannish in a shapeless gray coat that would do for winter or fall.

They greeted her unemotionally and separated so that she had to walk between them. Viola felt as if two of the king's grenadiers were escorting her to the Tower of London to be beheaded.

"Let's go to the stores first," suggested Mrs. Archer, as they made their way toward Eighty-Sixth Street.

That street is the Broadway of that part of Brooklyn. Its growth had been phenomenal, comparable to the booming of a mining town in the West. Almost overnight, after the extension of the subway, had sprung up stores of every kind, also banks and theaters.

The list of all the different kinds of establishments would fill two pages of a telephone directory. Only very small children were seen on Eighty-Sixth Street on this day—for the older ones were in school—and with these very small ones were their mothers or aged grandparents.

These people—who migrated in large quantities from the side streets and homes of the neighborhood—milled about the stores, or plodded aimlessly along the sidewalks, pushing baby carriages which, if not filled with one or two children, were stacked with grocery bundles.

Viola, Milly and Kate pushed their way along this remarkable modern

thoroughfare, and spent two or three hours in the most popular female indoor and outdoor sport the world has ever known—to wit: shopping. For a solid hour they nosed through the five-and-ten-cent store, and bought a total of twenty cents' worth of goods.

Milly tried on fourteen new hats, and walked out of each "shoppe" with the assurance that she'd "look around and maybe come back if she found nothing that suited her."

Kate tried on twelve pairs of shoes too small for her large "gunboats," and vowed at last that the shoes in this neighborhood were no good.

Viola gazed at and fingered longingly many expensive pieces of silk, classified with a word which every one pronounces uncertainly—"lingerie."

If anything in the whole run of female enthusiasms stirred her profoundly, it was lingerie. She turned sighingly from many an alluring window.

After two hours she was dead tired and heart-weary of Milly's prattle of boy friends back home, and of Kate's heavy, sententious remarks or crude, worn-out wisecracks.

Milly suggested that they rest up by going to a chop-suey restaurant, and thither they presently fared, to be served by a grinning Celestial, who brought bowls of Yat Kor Mein, Chow Mein, and Foo Yong Dun. Viola liked the orange table lights, but heartily disliked the jangling mechanical orchestra, which operated with a nickel in the slot.

Milly babbled incomprehensibly of parties and clothes, and Kate, the great Amazon, ate her Yat Kor Mein noisily. After the session here they made their way to the beauty shoppe across the street.

By this time Viola was sick and tired of the whole thing, and particularly so because of one annoying feature of the afternoon. Both her companions had continually been interpolating in their inane chattering praises of Albert.

Albert was this and he was that;

Albert was a dear; he was sweet, darling; if only Georgie were like Albert. Albert had such nice hair; Albert had such nice eyes and such a cute smile; Albert was so sincere; Albert reminded them of Lindbergh; Albert—

Viola longed to take them both by their necks and shake the nonsense out of them. She was disgusted with their silly, fatuous raving over her husband.

And why was she so disgusted? she asked herself. Because she admitted, she was violently, furiously jealous. In this mood she entered the beauty shoppe and sat unhappily and silently by while Milly and Kate had their hair trimmed and waxed.

She shuddered when she thought of the hours she still had to pass in company with these two women; but Albert would be at the Archer house around supper time, and that would make things easier, though, in a way, more difficult.

The three tired women plodded the long blocks back to the Archer house, and, once within, Kate flopped upon the couch, and Viola sank exhausted into the armchair she had occupied the night before. Milly, however, was of a breed that could dance all night without tiring, and, to overcome her fatigue, she took a different method—she turned on the radio and did her Black Bottom variation upon the frappé carpet.

"Ya-cha-cha" once again darted against Viola's eardrums and increased her headache. Then Milly invited her upstairs to see her "things," and they both went up to the guest bedroom, where hat boxes, trunks and suitcases were sprawled all over the floor.

While Viola sat wearily on an uncomfortable chair, Milly spread out her possessions on the great bed, or held them up for the young wife—who loved those things so much—to look at and envy.

As Milly dressed, Viola's eyes narrowed with a new realization. The girl was getting all dolled up.

Why all that careful selection of a gown, of pumps, of perfumes? The girl's toilet could not have been more painstaking if she had been a medieval princess, preparing for the arrival of a princely suitor from a far-away kingdom.

When they descended the stair again, Kate was moving lazily around the kitchen, getting supper ready. The men were expected from the office at any moment, and Milly was becoming more and more restless.

She practiced dance steps in the parlor, ran upstairs to dab on more powder, flitted into the kitchen, but flitted quickly out when she saw that she might have to work, and finally established herself dreamily at the front window.

Viola helped Kate. The meal was ready finally—five places set.

Six o'clock, the time for the men's arrival, came and went. So did seven. So did eight, and the women were wondering and remarking: "I wonder where they are?" "Funny that they didn't phone or nothin'." "Hope Al and Georgie are all right."

Still no word from them at nine o'clock. The three bewildered, disappointed and worrying women had eaten carelessly, and were now trying to still the restlessness and fears that oppressed them.

Kate, the most stolid of them all, dozed on the couch in the parlor and at last went to sleep. Her snores were the only sounds, for Viola and Milly had stopped trying to manufacture conversation.

Milly, Viola noted with malicious pleasure, was the embodiment of "all dressed up and no place to go." If ever sheer, keen disappointment were written upon a vamp's face, it was there on the face of Millicent Rawley.

Viola could almost forgive Albert for worrying her with his absence, but, as the evening wore on toward midnight, she grew less pleased with him, for to be forced to stay in this house

with these two shallow creatures was trying indeed.

Yet she did not dare leave, since Al might show up at any minute—and if anything had happened to him he might be brought here. She pictured all sorts of things that might have occurred—subway accidents, sudden attacks of sickness, street accidents, holdups, brawls.

By and by Kate stirred and woke up. "Didn't they come yet?" she asked heavily.

Viola shook her head.

"Gee," complained Mrs. Archer, "ain't that a shame, though? We'd 'a' had such a swell time, too. Look at poor Milly; she got all fixed up. Kin yuh beat it?"

She shook her head sadly and went to the window.

Milly had been sitting there for a long time, and now she looked up as her aunt approached.

"I'm so disappointed," Viola heard her tell Kate softly. "I did want to see him again."

"Yeah," agreed Kate compassionately. "Ain't he the sweetest thing, though? Me, too. Gosh, if Georgie was like that—Mrs. Wade don't know what a swell hubby she's got." She looked covertly at Viola over her shoulder. "Maybe she told him not to come."

Milly shrugged indifferently, as if Mr. Wade's wife were an unfortunate blot on the map. The two women were in a little alcove or small sun parlor. From there, they did not think, evidently, that one could hear them in the parlor proper.

That last remark was enough for Viola. She rose and went to the hall rack, and got her hat and coat.

"I'm going," she told them icily. "Tell Albert when he comes that I couldn't wait any more."

"Goin' home?" asked Kate stupidly.

She wanted to tell them just what she thought of them, she wanted to rush at them both and tear them apart

—these two devilish women who had tacitly, deliberately shoved her into the background and had assumed the right to gloat over her husband. She would like to take that pretty head of Milly's and pound it against the radio, make it do a Black Bottom of its own on the hard floor; or take that great torpid mass called Kate and slam her big, empty brain until some fragment of sense was stirred up in it.

But she did none of these things. She just tightened her small, white fists, looked hard at the two women, and suddenly yanked open the front door and ran out, slamming it behind her.

She was out of breath when she got home, and more than that—she was in a highly nervous state. The unhappiness of the whole day was pent up in her and she craved an outlet.

She wanted to hurl dishes or scream or cry, but there was lacking the igniting spark to set off her emotional pyrotechnics.

The igniting spark came when Albert appeared on the scene, at exactly quarter past one. When she heard him coming in, Viola made believe that she was sleeping on the couch. She would not give him the satisfaction of thinking that she had been waiting up for him.

Presently she knew that he was standing above her, looking down. He had tiptoed in. Now he joggled her arm tentatively.

She raised her eyelids, and in her rising anger, forgot to pretend that she had been sleeping. When he said nothing, she remarked caustically:

"Well, you might say where you've been."

"Gee, I thought you were sound asleep."

"I was, but you woke me with your tramping. I suppose you've been having a good time. I suppose you think that, since you can be such a knockout with one, that all the others will fall on your Apollo neck, too. Well, don't

mind me. After all, I'm only your wife."

"Aw, Vi, don't be like that."

"Did you take her home, whoever she was?" Viola inquired.

"Be yourself," he advised her. "I just went to a show with George—"

"Oh, you went to a show with George? How interesting! And what kind of a show, may I ask?"

He shrugged, as if it didn't matter.

"Revue," he answered wearily.

"And so, while I suffered, thinking you were dead, you were watching a revue? How nice. How thoughtful of you."

"It was too late to call you up."

She reminded him quickly that it had not been too late to call up before supper.

"Listen here," he exclaimed, flaring up, "I've got troubles of my own without being bawled out for nothin'!"

"What troubles? I suppose you're in love with Millicent, and worrying about how you're going to get rid of me. Well, you just try, hear that? You just try. If that girl ever comes within fifty feet of me, or you, either, she'll get what's coming to her, and you, too. I've stood enough of this business, and I"—she was beginning to break now, to grow hysterical—"I won't stand for it. I won't—I don't have to. You can take your girl friend and go to Paris or Reno—I don't care—I won't stay here—I'm going to leave to-night—"

Albert, his forehead creased with worried wrinkles, tried to put his arms around her, but she hit against him and broke away, then sought refuge in the bedroom.

There she lay and cried good and plenty—cried until she began to wonder vaguely why he didn't come and comfort her. Her tears stopped, her choking grew less audible, and finally she sat up, only to see Albert standing there in the doorway, watching her.

"Feel better, old girl?" he asked, smiling.

She just looked at him, like a small child that has cried for candy and finally got it.

"I knew you needed a good cry, and so I let you alone," he explained.

Then he sat beside her and talked very low, with his head bent down to watch his fingers aimlessly tolling off the fingers on her right hand. She listened meekly.

"The troubles I spoke about, Vi, were my troubles about this Millicent. I'm not swell-headed, but I could see that she was gettin' on your nerves by payin' too much attention to me. I kinda like it, of course—any one would—but it didn't seem right, and so I was thinking about it and trying to find a way to avoid her. So to-day I figured out that I'd stay away.

"To do that I had to get George to stay out, too, and I put it up to him straight. He agreed with me; said Milly was sweet on me. And so George and I ate in a cafeteria and took in a revue.

"It only cost me a coupla bucks, but that's better than maybe a lot of worry to you. I forgot all about phoning till the last minute, and then the show was starting. And after I was watching the show, I got to thinkin' that maybe it would be a good lesson to Millicent. She'd be expecting to see me and 'd be disappointed. I wanted to show her just how little I cared about her.

"Though," he added boyishly, "it wasn't so easy as it sounds, because I'm no hero nor nothin'. But Milly 'd kinda got me going, and it wasn't a

cinch for me to give up an evening dancing with her and all that—much as I care for you, Vi."

She looked up at him wonderingly, and knew that he was telling the truth. Unable to speak for the moment, she squeezed his hand.

Yes, he was right. It would be a splendid lesson to that vamp. That was the best punishment.

Then she told him the experience of the afternoon and evening, and he grinned.

"It's great how good my plan worked out, isn't it? I can forget all about being a little sorry I wasn't there when you tell me how disappointed she was. That's a let-down for her to take back with her to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes. George told me she goes back home to-morrow. She gets on a train at Grand Central—and keeps going for five or six hundred miles. The farther, the better for us."

The whole world cleared up for Viola—except for one little matter.

"But that picture in your album, Al—who's that?"

"I know now what one you mean. You silly nut, that's my cousin, Frances Bennett, up in Connecticut. They do look alike, don't they? But if you look close you can see it's just that Frances happens to be a blonde. She's married and has two children. She sent me that a long time ago—a picture I took of her. It's just the shiny glue I put it in the book with, that makes it look like it was put in lately."

Clinch!

THE END



THE MAN FROM THE RIO GRANDE

By ARTHUR EVAN JAMES

will be next week's Complete Novelette, a wildly exciting tale about a killer of three and the strange fashion in which he was run down.



His Service to Folly

By MORGAN MANSFIELD

Primed for high adventure, he had to act as clown for an emperor he despised, and match wits with mighty ruffians

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

PIRATES in the service of the Emperor of Santo Domingo capture a ship belonging to the Trelawneys, famous gunmakers. Young Basil Trelawney, whose French sweetheart, Violette de Tourraine, has recently sailed for Santo Domingo, arranges for the pirates to receive twelve of his father's guns in return for the freedom of the crew of the sunken ship, and a sum of money. Then while his father protests and his mother cries out, Basil jumps from a window and starts down to the pirate ship. He wants to sail for Santo Domingo to protect his sweetheart.

CHAPTER V (Continued).

THE GUNS OF TRELAWNEY.

BY flickering lights Basil saw that eleven of the guns were already missing from the rough, sea-washed planks; the twelfth and last was being hoisted aboard. "Quick

work," he muttered as he ran toward the fluttering lurid flame glare which lighted his face.

"A' curse on such a traitor!" panted a man captured from the sunken Albattross, the first one to recognize Basil. "Where's all your bold promises now, coward?"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 31

He and his shipmates ceased hauling on a tackle to get a moment's surcease from the grueling labor, and scowl at the youth.

Black and blue bruises showed on their sweating backs and shoulders as they panted and muttered vengeance on Basil and the pirates alike.

"Pull, you dithering swine," savagely roared the pirate boson. He brought a cat-o'-nine-tails *swish* across the nearest bare hide. "Lively now, sway away on the tackles."

Most of the pirate crew were busy stowing the guns in the hold of the barkentine, but a good many were still on the dock. These were armed with "misericordes" to prevent the Albacross's men from escaping, and also to lend a hand with the tackles.

Impatiently pacing the poop deck and nervously stroking his kinky beard was Le Baron de Banana, watching the loading of the guns. His scowl was imitated by Basil when he came under the cresset flare.

The boy's face was bleached for an instant of its color, then deep-dyed with a wrath against which all former rage was as nothing. Rushing at the pirate who wielded the barbed lash, he grasped the man's arm and wrenched it backward until the bone snapped.

An order and a sizzling oath broke from De Banana, and the pirates drew knives and leaped toward Basil.

"Come on, you curs," he shouted, backing to the quay edge so none could get behind him. He whipped out the blade buckled to his waist by his mother's hand. "Come on!" he cried as they hesitated before its whirling steel.

A dirk flashed beside him, but from an eye corner he caught the gleam, and blood gushed from a slashed wrist as the dirk rang on the quay stones. The pirate fell back, mouthing curses.

His evil comrades, fearing to make a pass at the barrier of steel Basil wove in the way, swung about to face a new peril.

"To the rescue, lads! To the rescue!" shouted big Jack Butts. "Young Basil fights for us. Throw the villains into the briny!"

He jumped for the nearest pirate, and, pinioning his arms in a viselike grip, jerked the man aloft as he would a sack of meal.

Jack's mates, with instantaneous change of opinion and heart, let the tackles fly by the run, at the mate's rallying command. Ropes smoked as they ran through blocks and the big gun shot downward between ship and quay. It splashed into the sea in company with the pirate hurled from the mighty arms of Jack Butts.

Basil was in a quandary. It would be fatal to his plans to further antagonize the pirates. His cry to Jack Butts to desist was drowned in the din of shouting and clattering gear. Instantly he rushed between friend and foe, and both fell back before his shining and menacing sword.

"Have done, Jack, and all of you get to your homes quickly!"

Jack's jaw fell and he looked his astonishment as did his mates at this turn of the tide. As they drew a breath of hesitation there came from the shore the sound of shouts and the clatter of accouterments and running men. Above it all yelped the strident tones of De Banana:

"The king's men! Cast off those mooring lines and aboard with you. Lively!"

The pirates had no time to spare if they wished to escape a fight with the soldiers, nor had they men to spare for it. Cursing, they rushed to obey orders.

De Banana was still shouting, unheard by his men in their wild rush to get away to sea. Pointing to Basil, he cried:

"Kill me that devil's spawn. Hell's curse on such a troublemaker! But for him we'd not be in this mess to-night!"

Along the quay on the double-quick

came the red-coated militia, and the hand of Jack Butts fell on Basil's shoulder.

"Stand aside, lad," he adjured the boy. "You have started a brawl they can finish." He jerked a thumb toward the rapidly advancing soldiers. "We'll have ship and guns too, and swing 'em to their own yardarms."

Basil shook off his detaining hand. To deliver the pirates to the soldiers was no part of his given word. He might and did resent this driving of English seamen to load cannon which it were treason to sell to pirate enemies of England, but he would not betray these buccaneers, even now.

Nor would he shirk full responsibility of his own adventure, although it led to a stain on his own name and a sentence of outlawry passed on him for all time.

Whirling, he faced the handful of soldiers, and the rapier play of light from his sword flashed anew as he made that barrier of shining steel on the entrance of the narrow quay. They could not shoot at the pirates without killing him and the Albatross's men who stood behind Basil, protecting the escaping pirates with their bodies.

The captain in charge cried to Basil:

"Stand aside, Trelawney! We've come to rescue you and end these villains. Can you not see we are friends?"

"Alack, no. My mind's a vast confusion. Stand back, Hugh Wentmore, nor offer harm to these my jolly comrades. Aboard, men of Le Diable Noir, and I'll follow.

"Quickly. For 'tis dry work making this shield of light to save you, and less a covering for me than lace on a lady's cheek. Who fights and runs away"—he drew breath and went on—"lives to fight, another day. Aboard with you, lads. Gefondo and Gordo-the-Butt, on board!"

The Cornishmen and soldiers stood agape to see him hold them at bay,

protecting the retreat of the pirates. Tense moments ticked on as buccaneers swarmed aboard and the head sails of Le Diable Noir, hoisted for emergency, were sheeted home. Then came a shout as the barkentine's bow swung off the quay. It warned Basil that he had not a moment to spare.

Turning, he slapped his sword in the sheath and darted across the quay, leaping over the sea widening between ship and wharf. He caught a dangling line and hung spinning like a spider on its filament, then clambered aboard, hand over hand, to the rail over which he swung a leg and sat astride.

There he swept off his hat, and its long plume fluttered in the wind as he bowed mockingly to the men on shore.

"Adieu, my friends—" His voice lifted an old tune to words of his own improvising:

"Adieu, my friends, farewell to you,
My heart is sad, but ever true.
God send your hearts, your thought
outruns

Which weighs Trelawney and his guns."

They caught the words, but their dull wits did not understand that Basil Trelawney was pleading for that justice which circumstance would blacken, pleading for understanding of his intention; all but Jack Butts, mate of the sunken Albatross. He saw pirates crouching behind Basil, shielded by the boy from the shots of the militia whose guns were at their shoulders waiting the word to fire.

Butts also saw the curve of Basil's young lips, a smile broken by trembling he could not control, as his heart was torn by the fate again striking so viciously at him. He was leaying under a black cloud, dishonored.

He had protected pirates against the king's men and joined their ship within sight of the rescue party. But Jack Butts understood. He shot from the crowd on the quay, palms folded together as he darted forward and dived into the sea.

Basil saw him emerge, shaking water from his eyes as he swam hand over hand toward *Le Diable Noir*. Basil balanced himself on the rail, swaying with the ship's motion as wind and tide caught her.

"Shoot!" he called to the soldiers, and ran lightly along his precarious footing, jumping to the deck only when he reached the stern and cast over a line to Jack Butts. Hand over hand the big mate climbed and was hauled over the taffrail by Basil.

"They've denied me everything," said Basil mournfully. "A shot had ended this last burden of my infamy, but they would not waste powder on such a caitiff. Oh, Jack, that I had never been born to shame so dreadfully the mother who bore me and the father who calls me 'son.'"

"A Trelawney turned buccaneer, his lot cast with sea thieves! And you, Jack Butts—there is yet time to get ashore and take them my word that they but lack understanding of my heart. Go quickly, friend; the sea widens between."

Jack Butts shook his head.

"You'll need me, lad. A man may choose the path he treads, and I choose to follow you."

CHAPTER VI.

ON A DANGEROUS QUEST.

THE lights of Cornwall fell astern. Basil stood at the barkentine's taffrail staring at them, and each diminishing pinpoint of radiance was like a needle stab in his heart. The pirate's crew were busy making sail. He heard the voice of De Banana calling.

Then the baron walked aft, and, chortling as if he mouthed some obscene joke, he offered his hand to Basil, who leaned against the rail.

"Well done, Trelawney. A pretty trick you served on the soldiers. Agape they stood, atrembling in their knees.

4 A

It almost salves the broken agreement to have so courageous a youngster cast in his lot with us. Henri Christophe the Emperor shall hear of this, and you'll yet rise from before his golden throne with a title and rich estates."

Basil's arms remained folded on his breast. He seemed not to see the proffered hand of De Banana.

"To rise, one must first bend the knee," he replied shortly. "And it is a little early to prophesy. I dare say, M. le Baron, you are ready to make payment for the guns according to our agreement."

"Come below. We'll wet our whistles and talk of this. Of course, you understand that the bargain failed of completion. I take only eleven guns to Christophe, and I have lost a good man, Ranselaar."

"It was no fault of mine that Ranselaar did not return to your ship. And, as for the guns, you spoiled their loading by following me into the harbor before I returned with my father's consent. Having first broken our agreement, you need not think to be released from payment for twelve guns."

Walking beside the baron, Basil descended the companionway and entered the captain's cabin, where in contrast to that austere clean room of Ranselaar's there was evidence of wild prodigality, treasure of pirate forays, spilled about; velvets and satins piled untidily on a couch which still bore the impress of a man's recumbent body.

"Gefondo warmed my nest too soon," complained the baron. "I suffer from the cold of these northern waters, and bade the minion roost here for an hour before I turned in to keep me from chill."

The hunchback, Gefondo, appeared at once carrying a tray that contained a bottle from the lazarette which seemed to blink in the light from its cobwebs and musted wicker covering.

"Brave old wine to toast brave young additions to our company," pro-

posed Gefondo with an impudent leer toward the baron.

Basil ignored the speech, but looked long at Gefondo. The hunchback wore fine garments, unspotted and unwrinkled, fine wrist laces, and amethysts on his fingers. His face, in spite of the evil company he kept, had a strange and wistful nobility. Basil wondered as he took a chair at the table end if, like Ranselaar, Gefondo had also fallen foul of Henri Christophe, and was forced to a pirate life.

"This matter of payment," he said to De Banana, "I promised my father that you would pay the gold. I have come aboard to get it. In place of Ranselaar, who is left behind, you have two men, Jack Butts and myself."

"Hum-m. We might sign you on as an ensign and Butts as quartermaster, and you'd share with the others whatever loot is taken," offered the baron as he carefully fitted his finger tips together and looked down his flat nose. "You'd scarcely dare go back to England now. They'd swing you on a gibbet."

"I'd risk that, and take it if it came. But I sign no papers, M. le Baron. And for protecting your men while they boarded ship, I ask only an extra hundred guineas. I'll even risk the unlucky number thirteen."

"It'll be a lucky day when you collect that debt," chortled the baron. "For the gold is still in the coffers of Henri Christophe. But I'll be generous. I'll guarantee you an audience with the black emperor, and you may then present to him in person the bill."

"And have him pay me by dubbing me 'Baron Sugarcane' or 'Lord Potato,' or even 'Marquis Yam.'"

"You'll sign the articles," said the baron as he turned to scowl at the hunchback, who displayed his strong white teeth in a wide and silent grin as he poured the wine and offered it first to Basil. "For we do not carry

passengers, if you had troubled to find out, on *Le Diable Noir*."

"I had little time to ask what you carry. Besides, I knew you would not, could not, well refuse. And as a passenger I desire that cabin of Ranselaar's which I shared on the voyage home, and I should consider it a favor if Gefondo here would serve me."

The hunchback nodded. His smile held less of diabolic mirth as he turned his face toward Basil.

"Trelawney, you command as if you, not I, were master."

"Monsieur, your lack of manners compel me. But in exchange I'm willing to polish up that lack in you. If you watch me closely you'll learn that quickly. I am nothing if not generous in that way."

"For instance, 'tis unseemly to choke on a draft of wine and spew it down one's linen. And it spoils a man's smile to widen his mouth by wiping it on a wrist."

"We'd be so much more endurable one to the other if only you would watch and profit by my example. Gefondo, a cloth if you please, to wipe his chin. Make haste!"

The baron glowered at Basil, but seemed unable to detect in the boy's face a sign of that ridicule he suspected. The eyes of Gefondo sparkled, but he kept a grave countenance.

"Have the lad teach you those dance steps he performed on the plank end that night we sank the *Albatross*," he suggested.

"Most certainly," said Basil quickly. "'Tis the same step used when one is upheld in thin air by a necklet of hempen rope at a yardarm. It may serve you in time of need, monsieur, and the practice will keep me from forgetting how 'tis done."

His voice was so pleasant and his smile so winning that the Baron de Banana could only grin in turn. His thick wit, bequeathed by that wandering sailor who sired him, was not

sharpened by the mixed blood of his half Indian, half negro mother.

He was cunning, but not clever. He had that illiteracy of mentality which no amount of schooling could overcome. He loved supremacy and flattery, and showed a surface loyalty to Henri Christophe due to favors which the black emperor showered upon those who served him.

On the journey north Basil had seen that De Banana could be wheedled by flattery, and while he scorned to use the fulsome praise which the pirates sloshed into their captain's ears, he was too shrewd to neglect the chance of at once gaining a whiphand over the baron in readiness for a time when he might be hard pressed by events which would arise before *Le Diable Noir* touched the shores of Santo Domingo.

The thick fingers of the baron rumbled his black hair and he smirked foolishly.

"Shall we begin, then?" he asked, and scowled at Gefondo. "Clear out this hog's wallow. There's not a place to step between the litter, man."

"'Tis as you like it best, master," replied the hunchback. "But these candles are nearly guttering. Why not come on deck where your men can see and note your grace? They deserve a treat after this night's work."

"By all means. The night is fair, and should an English ship catch sight of us, they'll see how we rejoice over new recruits."

Basil led the way to the door, then turned abruptly toward the passage-way leading to Ranselaar's cabin, which he entered. He bathed his shame-flushed face and threw off his coat.

The crimson velvet that had once covered him was neatly folded on a locker. He drew it around his shoulders, then uncorking a bottle of eau de vie, he blacked the cork in the candle flame, and before a mirror applied swiftly drawn black strokes to his face,

marking slant brows, and shadows below his eyes.

He wet his hair and twisted the locks into two stiff horns on his forehead. A fair devil looked back at him from the looking-glass. Satisfied, he went on deck, where news of the dancing lesson had been spread by Gefondo and a small Haitian negro waited with a banjo, grinning at this chance for melody.

By this time all sail was set, and those of the crew who were not busy clearing and coiling the running gear were gathered in the waist. Baron de Banana waited, trying to look important and succeeding only in a smirk, until Basil appeared with one corner of the velvet whipped over his left shoulder. He bowed, to the guffaws and clapping of hands, then nodded to the Haitian boy, who plucked a merry tune on the banjo.

"'Tis thus 'tis done." Basil swept into a heart-warming dance, snapping his fingers like castanets and treading the boards daintily; then snatching the banjo from the urchin, he played a merrier tempo and nodded to the baron to begin.

De Banana stepped into the circle, lifted one hand and tried to balance on one foot while he pointed the other toe. But if his mentality smacked of negroid, his body was all Teuton and badly hung. He lost his balance and lurched heavily to one side with the heave of the deck, and was saved from falling by the quick grasp of Basil.

"This way," said young Trelawney, wrapping an arm about the pirate. "Think that I am your lover and you my sweet maid, and follow my steps."

But it was as a picot the baron served, with Basil dancing around him, until his head swam with dizziness, and when he was released he fell prone on deck, lifting his big head and scrambling drunkenly to his feet.

"Well done!" cried Basil. "When wine is scarce, monsieur le baron, you

now know a trick that will serve as well. Now listen."

Standing in the circle of seamen, Trelawney sang a tune to his own accompaniment:

"There is a bird sings on a tree,
Alack-a-day, allons.
And many a mate he steals from me,
Alack-a-day, allons.
But when spring has to summer grown
His nest is full, his sweetheart flown
While I still have my nest alone,
Alack-a-day, allons."

It was a song they liked. They understood its meaning and cheered him on to further efforts. He went from sprightly French chansons to tenderer love melodies, then swept chords which bent his young head until nearing the end of a verse his eyes sought those of Jack Butts, who stood at the outer fringe of the circle of men.

He played a sonorous, thrumming march step that brought the shoulders of Jack to their fullest height, and to Trelawney a look of gratitude.

"Sing, Jack," he said, "don't leave it all for me to do."

Like the mighty chords of an organ came the voice of Jack Butts, a battle cry with words in Gaelic that none understood although Basil knew their English translation:

"Men of Harlech, in the hollow,
Do ye hear like rushing billow
Wave on wave the surges follow
Battle's mighty sound.
Hear the shouts of English foemen,
English spearmen, English bowmen.
Be they hinds or be they yeomen,
They shall bite the ground."

"Well done, Jack! Now we sing the national anthem of monsieur le baron. You may join in the chorus with a will." He seemed to remain for a time lost in deep thought, then struck up a tinkling air known to Cornishmen as the "Rogue's March."

His words were touched with the broad Irish brogue he could so well imitate and brought smiles from the men, ill-concealed by those whose wits

were nimble enough to catch the meaning:

"Monsieur, le doughty baron, will always be awearin'

The curls his mother handed him,
the blush a blackbird wears,
He's named for the banana; his watchword is mafiana.

He's bound to best his enemies with all the words he swears.

Then hail to De Banana man of San Domingo Island!

Like coconuts and mangoes, he's native to high trees.

Like parrakeets and monkeys, he's not a man of my land.

He'd ripen better hanging high as anybody sees."

Jack Butts was aghast at the daring of the troubadour. He came close to Basil and caught at his arm, warning him to desist. The hunchback leaning against the deckhouse was convulsed with silent laughter, and the baron seemed to choke with the struggle whether to burst into rage or assume a good nature he could ill dissemble.

"Enough of this, Sir Clown. 'Tis late. We'll meet anon. Your tongue is glib. I think I owe you a debt to pay later." It was a warning, as plain as words could state, but Basil swept a hand to his heart and bowed from the waist.

Then, still strumming the "Rogue's March," he disappeared down the companionway. In his cabin he closed the door and flung himself on the couch, weary enough. But his eyes were scarcely closed when the door opened and the hunchback entered.

"Asleep, master? Even so, 'twere better to waken and listen. Boldness such as you have shown is brave, but far from wise. But the fat is in the fire.

"This captain, having drunk himself to stupor yet mutters in his sleep 'cochon!' And wakens to ask if I thought it better to use a hemp's end or wait for Henri Christophe to provide a more lingering, long-suffering exit from this world."

Basil yawned, then swung his feet to the floor and looked at Gefondo, who rubbed one hand over the other and gazed into Basil's eyes.

"You mean that he plans to end your crooked career?"

Gefondo shook his head.

"He fetches me back alive," he assured Basil, "Christophe sent me to watch him, and Ranselaar to watch me. He's a wise man, this Henri Christophe. He trusts no man, not even himself."

"I'm sorry for him," said Basil simply. "Now, I could not live without faith in those about me. That is why I requested that you be near me, Gefondo."

His winning smile wreathed his lips. The hunchback cast him a glance of quick suspicion, but saw no guile in Trelawney's eyes. He seemed to wait a moment for Basil to drop his mask, then his habitual grin disappeared and his eyes were soft as those of a spaniel who loves his master.

"Not many men have asked for me to serve them," he said. "You'll hear the name of Gefondo at Christophe's court, and mayhap 'twill change your opinion."

"I take men and women as I find them, Gefondo," was the reply. "I have no fault to find with you."

The hunchback quivered from head to heels, then dropped beside the couch and lifted its pall to his face.

"No act of mine will give you cause for regret, master," he said softly. "But in turn, give me your faith. Do as I say. Take neither food nor wine not served by me, and warn that giant Jack Butts to watch his meat and drink."

"This man who styles himself Baron de Banana has long presided at voodoo gatherings in the jungles of Santo Domingo. They pray men to death. Yet he is not content with that ceremonial. He relies on more certain means."

"Are you warning me?" asked Basil.

"So much as a man dares," was the reply, "but more of that anon. Come, take off that belt and loose these garments. See! Here is a robe of silk, soft as a caress against the flesh. Rest, young master, for once we have touched Santo Domingo shores, you'll need to keep awake."

Although he much preferred being alone, Basil allowed Gefondo to putter about while he undressed and put on the silk night robe. His pillow was clean and soft and he slept free of fear as a child, to waken at dawn when Gefondo brought him a bowl of steaming broth.

The hunchback shaved him and spent some time over the arrangement of his dress; then when Basil went on deck, he returned to the cabin, polished its mahogany paneling, and with meticulous care tidied Basil's belongings.

On deck there was a stormy wind on a winter sea, and the baron was sleeping off the night's potations. Jack Butts had been assigned to quatermaster's duties, and Basil talked with him awhile.

The storm, brewing at dawn, whipped into a gale under which *Le Diable Noir* staggered and wallowed for many days. Basil, while a good traveler, had no fancy for sea-washed decks, and stayed below where he inveigled Gefondo to games of baccarat, or sang for the hunchback those songs he loved best, the tender ditties which breathed sighs and tears.

Gefondo listened with bent head and seemed to drink in the melody like a man starved for beauty.

Le Banana was drunk for a week on the Jamaica rum copiously carried and broached, then he emerged, bathed and dressed in foppish elegance, his fingers loaded with rings resplendent on his dark hand, his ears weighted with twin diamonds as big as a man's thumb-nail. He appeared at table and greeted Basil as though there had been no interval of his debauch.

"This wind blows vilely, but it

serves Santo Domingo bound ships," he said. "We have luck, young sir, and my indisposition being past, I'd take a second dancing lesson of your skill."

"Gladly," responded Trelawney. "But in this cabin, sir. Wet decks remind me of another night which I am loath to recall."

"*Sacré bleu!*" quoth the baron contemptuously. "Your stomach turns at thoughts of gore? You'll need to harden it before you meet King Christophe."

"I mind me, that he has a slide leading down from his audience chamber, into which are thrown those he considers unnecessary to the welfare of his empire. I've heard their dying shrieks many times as we sat feasting. One of them was his white wife who had found another lover. But you are young to hear such tales."

"Too young by far," answered Trelawney, "to understand why a woman should turn from men like you and Christophe."

The baron turned sidewise to survey himself in the mirror.

"He has many wives," he sighed, "and I am yet a bachelor."

"Then 'tis by choice, I'll warrant; or because you're too proud to give up liberty to maids of Santo Domingo."

"There are some, I'll admit," the baron coughed, flourishing a kerchief of scarlet silk, "I might have wed, only 'twould grieve those I left, and grieve a wife when I sail away, as now."

"Of a certainty," agreed Trelawney.

"There was expected to arrive at the island, a marquise of France by name of De Tourraine, when I left. Christophe's men overran an estate at Grand Pré and took letters and other trinkets, and some I read, which told of her coming. With the letters was a miniature on ivory.

"Christophe gave it to me and hinted that if I brought the guns he wanted, I might ask the favor of the hand of this French lily flower."

"De Tourraine!" Basil's blood seemed to freeze in his veins. There could be only one maid by that name sailing for Santo Domingo.

"Violette de Tourraine, a pretty name, a pretty maid by her likeness. But she sails in troublous times. I hope we may reach port before some other claimant to his favor moves Emperor Christophe. Not that fair maids are scarce."

"Of a certainty." Basil's voice was toneless. He saw, by the light of memory, a maid of France standing in the cloistered seclusion of a garden at Rouen, tall lilies banked in ferns about her skirts, and on her face the bloom of innocence, sweet-flushed with consciousness of love that dawns in the springtime of life.

He saw again the trembling of her lips and the quick breath lifting her bosom. The touch of her fingers on his hand had been butterfly light.

He seemed to see her facing this leering Baron de Banana, fear in her eyes, a shadow like death at her heart, and it was all he could do to retain his composure. Yet he dared not betray his secret.

"Suppose, instead of dancing lessons, we throw dice and name as a wager, the hand of this maid you speak about and whom you have not yet seen. I take your word for her beauty, and trust to your honor to pay the debt should you lose.

"Against that stake, I lay my life. Time drags on this cruise, and if I lose, your men will have the joy of seeing me dance a last measure. I'll promise to make it lively."

"You jest," declared De Banana. "You always jest, it seems."

"Better a laugh than a sigh," retorted Trelawney. "Gefondo, fetch dice for us, and watch while I win myself a wife from the baron."

Gefondo brought cubes of ivory in a box of gold, heavily chased, and placed it on the table.

"'Tis the dice our captain always

uses," he said. "But the stakes for which you play, who holds them?"

"You may hold their meaning in your mind, Gefondo. 'A wife for me—or death. Life—or love. What better stakes could a man play for? Shake, monsieur le baron, and shake skillfully. You have all to gain and only a maid to lose."

Basil shook first, and when the cubes rolled out of their box in the baron's hand, he shouted shrilly.

"Three times out of five," he called. "I give every man a chance."

Again they shook, and again he won. Gefondo leaned over the table, his breath coming in a quick hiss, his eyes shifting to watch the faces of both men and the cast of fate.

Basil, instead of shaking the dice from the box, poured them into his palm and rolled them. They fell, double sixes, the number upturned by the baron.

Again he shook them and they rolled along his fingers and remained the same. He looked inquiringly at the baron, who watched his own thick fingers and appeared not to observe Trelawney.

Gefondo leaned still closer, his chin on his wrists, nor would he glance at either man. He was like a cat watching the antics of mice. Basil tossed the dice from his fingers, high in the air, and they spun and dropped on his spread palm, and again the double-six was turned up.

Then he tossed them on the table, turned to the door, and wrenched it open. He stood, clasping its frame edge and looked at the baron.

"The wager is off, monsieur," he said. "One may gamble with fate loaded against him, but not cheat where a woman is concerned."

His hand pointed to the open doorway. For a moment De Banana gazed at him as if he did not understand, then purple crept under his dark skin and his thick lips drew back.

"You dare to say that I cheated?

Whelp!" His hand flew to his side and came away with his sword. Basil slammed shut the door and faced the empurpled man, with his own slender Damascene blade shining as he held its tip and bent it in an arc of light.

With a foul oath the baron slashed at the steel bow before Basil seemed ready, but he was not quick enough for the youth, who had learned his fencing under a master of the art in France.

There was a twinkling of steel; sparks; the sharp tinkling of metal as he honed the sword of the baron much in the way a man sharpens a knife. He kept it fairly stationary before the owner's nose, so that De Banana had no chance to lunge.

Then, as the sharpening worked lower, nearer the hilt, the baron's sword suddenly leaped from his hand and flew upward. It chanced that the mizzen boom, with its great sail furled on account of the gale pursuing them, lay directly over the open skylight above De Banana's head, and the point of his sword entered the big pine spar.

It hung there, quivering, and swaying with the motion of the ship. The hunchback leaped from his crouching position by the table, and his face was twisted in a silent explosion of mirth. He wore the countenance of a devil. Basil waited, again curving his blade daintily between his hands.

"Your sword, monsieur, seems to have flown a little high, but no doubt you can use that dance step learned on deck and show pretty heels in doing it. Let's see how well you've grasped my lessons. Jump!"

His sword wreathed light about the baron's ankles. There came a squeak as its tip drew a little blood through the silken hose, and the thud of heels and grunt of the man as he leaped and missed by a hand's breadth the hilt of his sword.

"Higher, monsieur!" Trelawney broke into that air he had fitted to words of his own verse, and he sang as

he smoothed the thick calves of De Banana, wiping the oozing blood on the silk-clad legs, his sword darting like a serpent's tongue.

"Then hail to this Banana, son of San Domingo Island,
Like coconuts and mangoes, he's native to tall trees.
Like parrakeets and monkeys, he's not a man of my land,
He'd ripen better hanging high, as anybody sees."

The swaying motion of the sword worked its tip loose, and it fell to the table with a crash, the blade touching the hand of Gefondo, who snatched the scratch to his lips and laughed, wide-mouthed and without sound.

Basil took the sword by its tip and offered the hilt to the baron, then jumped suddenly aside to escape the treacherous thrust.

"Do you care to try another round, monsieur? No? Then I'll say 'good night.'"

Again he opened the door, and the baron darted through. Basil closed the door, and his eyes met the gaze of Gefondo.

"You laugh," he said. "And I have merited laughter. There is no more unhappy man than I. Take a good look, Gefondo, at a fool!"

His head dropped forward until his brow rested on his arms crossed on the table. Behind his hot eyelids was that vision of a French garden, and Violette, standing beside the lilies.

And, like a slug creeping darkly, the face of the Baron de Banana intruded. It was a vision that haunted his dreams for many a night.

CHAPTER VII.

PORTENTS OF PERIL.

NEXT morning, when Basil came on deck, the gale had somewhat abated. On that horizon from which the wind came was a long, narrow streak of blue sky, its edge gilded

with sun-gold from the east; a harbinger of joy for the seaman since it would usher in a spell of fair weather.

The gulls which had sought safety in high altitudes during the storm were uttering their plaintive cries overhead, as if begging for scraps from the galley.

Under the bows of the barkentine bonitas leaped in the yeasty foam as they hunted a morning meal of flying fish, then disappeared as if by magic at the arrival of a school of porpoise, broaching and spouting as they crossed the vessel's course a few cable lengths ahead.

The mountainous seas were more lumpy, although they still ran high, threatening each moment to curl over the stern of the barkentine.

In the diminishing wind the speed of *Le Diable Noir* was lessening. Her crew were shaking reefs out of the sails and hoisting other canvas so that she might run from those charging white horses with the steaming manes.

Basil had taken a few turns on the quarter-deck when there came a thud at his heels. He jerked about to see a marlinespike standing upright in the pine planks. It had missed him by a hair's breadth. Stooping, he wrenched it loose and tossed it over the rail.

"'Tis as bent, most likely, as the mind of the man who aimed it," he commented. "Yet it would have split me like a fowl trussed for baking. And if I were a ship's captain, I'd have no such slippery-fingered bunglers," he added, nodding curtly to De Banana, who came from behind the deck house at that moment.

"I am not to blame for accidents, sirrah," said the baron.

"But blundering is an unforgivable sin in man or woman," retorted Trelawney. "This is the second pointed reminder to fail of its mark and leave a scar in the planks, as that other one left a stain on silk."

The baron was not too dull to understand his meaning and that Basil

recalled the scratch on his ankle from his sword the night before.

"Still, water will wash away even the marks of blundering. No doubt it would swell this dimple in your deck planks."

He was in a reckless mood. The scene of the night and cabin left no triumph in his heart. He now carried a greater trouble than ever in his life.

For hours he had lain awake, thinking of what De Banana had said; of Violette de Tourraine arriving in Santo Domingo, and the painting of her face on ivory in the possession of this scoundrel, as well as the fact that her hand was promised to him by the black emperor.

At first Trelawney felt a wild desire to kill the baron and for all time end the nightmare of this menace for Violette. Then wisdom prevailed. To kill De Banana would be like pulling off one leg of a crab; another would grow in its place. Or, like killing a serpent to release a brood of vipers it had swallowed.

Basil had sense enough to know that Henri Christophe would have many other tools to reward for villainous services, and if they were of the same mettle as this pirate captain, it seemed to the boy that the only way to serve Violette would be to pluck her bodily from such danger. Or, failing that, send her sweet soul to heaven and follow after.

Perhaps she was already on Santo Domingo shores, while he was on the high seas. Tossing on his couch, brushing the curls from his forehead, seeking to silence the myriad tongues of fear which whispered of terrible things that might befall the girl he loved, Basil came to see that this arrangement to marry her to De Banana might be, after all, a circumstance that would keep her from being wedded to other minions of Henri Christophe.

Promised to De Banana, she would not be molested by other unwelcome suitors until the return of Le Diable

Noir, carrying Trelawney as well as the baron.

Basil had traveled in France and Italy and even into the German states, but he knew nothing of the island of Santo Domingo. He thought it would appear like other countries, with cities and towns, and a king's palace where he might seek admittance and gain the ear of the emperor.

Kings and rulers, he knew, were unstable persons on whom to place hope. But he meant to see the court of Henri Christophe, gain a sight of Violette and warn her of perils, then take her by force, if necessary, and take ship for France or England.

He had also a plan to demand from Henri Christophe the price of the Trelawney cannon. Caring little enough for gold, he had that lofty impertinence of youth that would demand the completion of high-handed bargaining. He meant to return in triumph, prove his valor, and in some measure justify that adventure which began when he ran away to sea, a stowaway in the Albatross. There was no humility or even modesty in Basil Trelawney.

But he did not misunderstand the meaning of the marlinespike stabbing the deck at his feet. It had not been a blunder except in missing its mark. He would need to watch closely or be killed.

Owing to milder weather prevailing as Le Diable Noir neared tropic waters, the parrot belonging to Gordo-the-Butt and named after Emperor Christophe, had ventured on deck and climbed to the top of the deck house.

There, it spread its wings and preened its feathers with its cruel, curved beak, then cursed comically in three languages. There were several parrots on board, pets of the crew, but "Emperor Christophe" was the oldest, the most battle-scarred of plumage, and much the cleverest talker.

"Carramba!" it croaked. "Damn my eyes! *Sacré mon Dieu! Donnez-moi, un verre de sangre!*"

"Art thirsty, bird, that your tongue trips to so many tongues?" asked Basil. He reached a finger to stroke its head and was promptly nipped.

"At least, you have tasted blood, and I have a lesson not to fondle a villain. Half Spanish, half French, and a good English curse. That shows you must have been hatched in a pot."

"In a cantina on the quay at Cape François," offered the baron, who seemed to be curbing his desire to snarl and masking savage temper by restraint. "In that same cantina where Henri Christophe learned to speak English from British seamen whom he served with food and wine. Trelawney, few men rise from such humble beginnings as wiping table slops to be an emperor."

"I'd like to hear the tale." Basil seated himself on a coil of hemp line, and smiled as if between him and the baron there was no ill will.

"Christophe was once a slave, just as Toussaint L'Overture was also a slave," said the baron. "Both rose from slavery and fought for the freedom of their fellow slaves. They had courage and brains.

"Christophe served Toussaint as a lieutenant in the conflagrations which slaughtered the white overlords, and Toussaint gave Christophe the north of the island to keep in order, and he gathered men and became powerful.

"He cultivated the land and built his fortress on Bonnet à L'Évêque. Toussaint L'Overture was sent to a French dungeon, and Dessalines made himself king, but there had been bad blood and quarrels between him and Christophe, and Dessalines was murdered.

Then Henri Christophe made himself king. He is a big man, bright-eyed and commanding. Or at least, he was. Fat hampers him now, and his wives have won him to softer living. He has never been free from the jungle worship that his father brought from Africa—

"But talking is dry work. Wine! Tomba!" he called. And, as if the black boy had been waiting the summons, he came running with a salver on which two flagons stood. At a nod from the baron he presented the salver to Basil Trelawney.

It seemed to the boy that the clean salt wind was more refreshing on that sunny morning than wine; that, having spent the night in troubled thoughts of Violette, he was in no mood for drinking. He shook his head.

"What! You refuse a cup of wine with me?" thundered the baron. "How am I to take that insult?"

"Oh, I did not mean you to take that interpretation of my mood," said Basil quickly. "I'll drink, monsieur, to your good health and safe arrival in Santo Domingo."

But as he reached for the cup, the salver was tilted by Tomba's clumsiness in trying to keep his sea legs. Both flagons slopped wine over their brims toward Basil.

He lifted the one farthest from his hand, drank deep, and replaced it on the salver. Then, on the face of De Banana he saw a baffled expression, and he scowled at Tomba.

"The foot of that cup drips wetly," he roared. "Fetch me a fresh one."

Sudden suspicion of the contents of that wine flagon refused by De Banana, smote Basil. He quickly snatched the cup and offered it to the parrot, for he had often seen it sipping heel-taps from wine cups of the crew. The baron's hand went out to snatch it away.

"Poor sport, that is, to make a bird drunk," he objected.

Basil did not reply. The parrot grasped one edge of the cup in his claw and dipped its beak. Basil thrust his shoulder between the bird and pirate captain so that he could not interfere.

A second and third sip ran down the parrot's craw, then it released the cup rim and panted with its beak open. In a moment or two longer, its wings were

spread, and it was fighting a convulsion. The white skin covered its beady eyes and with a shudder it fell—dead!

Basil felt his heart grow cold. The wine offered him had been poisoned. He saw murderous hate in the eyes of the baron as he turned on his heel without a word and went forward.

Twice in one hour, Basil's life had been the object of attack; first by the marlinespike, then the poisoned wine. He was at bay and could trust only Jack Butts and Gefondo, the hunchback. Worst of all, the next attempt to murder him might come in the dark and he would not have the opportunity of fair fight.

All his youth rebelled against that menace of fear clutching at him, the thought of treacherous bludgeoning, a stealthy stab, or the convulsive agony of poison.

He dreaded unspeakably a death on this ship, and the inglorious end of his son which would be the news carried to Squire Trelawney.

Standing near the bow, thoughts gathered and wheeled like gulls swooping as the cook cast scraps from the galley. Those thoughts, feeding on fear, grew darker. Never before had he been afraid.

Yet he wondered why the baron did not strike boldly. He was in the man's power, and could have been dispatched quickly with piratical license. Standing there, a prey to his troubles, he heard his name spoken, and turned to find Jack Butts beside him.

"Lad, that marlinespike—" began Jack, but Basil touched his finger to his lips, a warning for silence.

"I've just come through worse, Jack. The wine—"

"Aye," interrupted Butts. "I saw the dead parrot. But the men like your songs and antics, lad. And they have no love for this ship's captain."

"He has tried to have you knifed by one or two of his crew. But they'd as lief kill a kitten, or a bird whose songs waken them in the morning. I've

heard the talk fore and aft. Even the cabin boy, Tomba, who served the poison wine, hated his task.

"No, this Banana—God's wrath on such rotten fruit—is hard set to find a murderer for you. 'Tis passing strange, for they like killing and bloodshed if half the tales they tell are true."

"Then, also, the hunchback is a power on board. Some say he deals in black magic, and they tell wild tales of jungles where blackamoors dance about fires and roast a 'goat without horns,' and pray men to death."

"The hunchback often comes below warming a candle between his palms and grinning. He asks whose likeness he'll make of the wax. And one night he made a true figure of Tomba the cabin boy, and stuck a dagger in its belly."

Butts paused to wet his lips and take a deep breath.

"True as I live, the black boy screamed and doubled up with pains that broke the sweat on his brow," continued Jack. He wagged his head as if he could not understand the thing he stated, but knew it to be true. "Then the hunchback squeezed the wax into a ball, and as suddenly this Tomba was well. I am afraid of Gefondo."

"No need to fear him, Jack. He sleeps inside my cabin. I do not know why he favors me, but I trust him."

"I know why men like you, lad," said the big man earnestly, "although I can't explain it. From a little chap I've liked you, when you and Mistress Betty Roe ran away from your nurses and caught my fingers in your little fists, and badgered me to tell you sea tales, of whales, and sharks, and storms. Mistress Betty'll miss you, lad."

"As a sister misses a brother, Jack. But have a care for yourself. We'll need each other yonder."

He turned and went below. There, he played patience with slips of ivory on which kings and queens were

painted, and which Gefondo said had been the gaming cards of a Spanish don on some ill-fated vessel that fell prey to the pirates of *Le Diable Noir*.

He sent Gefondo to summon Jack Butts, and, stripped to the buff, they wrestled and had rounds of fisticuffs. For Basil wanted still greater strength and endurance of his body and still firmer muscles.

From his seat, crosslegged on a locker, the hunchback would watch these sports, his chin dropped forward on his crossed wrists, his hands hanging limp from his knees. Sometimes he would laugh, and sometimes sigh. But he never lost sight of Basil Trelawney, nor did the boy touch food or drink not served by Gefondo.

The sea became bluer and less troubled by gales. Sharks, grim gray darting ghouls of the sea, followed the ship and turned white bellies to grab anything tossed overboard, their jaws gaping to show row upon row of teeth.

The captain was almost invisible at that time. He drank constantly, and when he appeared on deck was so befuddled with wine that he could not recognize one man from another.

But when the sea wind, perfumed by land breezes that blew from flower girt valleys of the West Indian islands, came to their sails, the baron sobered. He appeared on deck one day dressed in gayer velvets than ever before, bejeweled and pomaded, gold chains lacing his paunch, diamond buckles on his shoes.

"Now," whispered Gefondo to Basil, "there is danger. Young master, if I know the signs, you will not leave this ship alive. For while in his cups, Banana muttered that he was a fool to have mentioned before you the name of that maid whose face, painted on ivory, lies in his jewel case—the maid about whom you tossed dice to win."

"He carries her picture with him?" asked Basil, shocked anew to think that such infamy was done to the painting of Violette.

"Aye. Wait here, young master, and I'll show you."

He darted from the room and presently returned to drop in Basil's hand a small case of shagreen, the lid of which opened at the touch of a thumb. There, on a bed of blue violet, lay the oval of ivory. From it the face of Violette looked out, young, sweet, colored as tenderly as the dawn sky.

Pearls circled the gold mounting. The smile on her lips was more priceless to Trelawney. It whipped his blood to fire, and red motes swam before his eyes.

He did not at that moment notice the packet of letters brought by Gefondo, but as he snapped the case shut, he ripped open the amethyst buttons of his waistcoat and slipped the case with Violette's picture next his heart, then again fastened his garments.

"Tell De Banana that I thieved this gem," he said harshly. "Lie for me this once and I'll make it up to you, if it be in hell. For between your captain and me there is only one bond, and that is life!"

"He may take mine. In such case, destroy this picture. But if I land, he will never again see the face of the girl who sat for this painting."

"'Twould sear her sweet eyes to look on such a beast. How far are we from Santo Domingo shores, Gefondo?" Basil seemed to muse aloud, sunk deep in thought, his head resting on one palm, his elbow on the couch pillow.

"To-night, I think, young master, we may sight land. I smell mimosa and wild honeysuckle on the wind. And I heard one man say that he caught sight of land birds at noon. But, hark! Something seems amiss with De Banana."

There was the sound of heavy steps and the thunderous thudding of a sword hilt on the door. Gefondo leaped to open it, and the baron stalked into the cabin.

Basil did not rise. He was far past

caring whether the mask of tolerance between them was dropped or not. De Banana looked down at him with eyes that were bloodshot from drink and rage.

"I have lost a trinket—the miniature of which I told you. Now, no man on board cares for a pictured face unless it be you, dog!" Then he caught sight of the packet of letters on the table and reached for them, but Basil snatched and thrust them inside his coat.

"I took the miniature," said Basil coolly. "I would have won the lady had you not cheated at dice. The wager is mine by default—your fault."

"Thief! You confess taking my belongings? The fate of thieves on board is shortly told. I'll not trouble you to restore it now. We'll get you done with, then find the trinket."

"Gefondo, seize, bind him! Then take him to the brig. We'll hang the swine at sundown. 'Twill be a pretty sight for Cap François men, to see him at the yardarm."

But when Gefondo slowly shook his head, the baron shouted a foul oath.

"Mutiny aboard? Then we'll have the two of you aloft. Here, Gordo!" He ran to the door calling: "A thief aboard. Put him in irons." He seemed purposely to have omitted Gefondo from the order of punishment, as if in some manner he feared the power of the hunchback.

Gefondo turned his wits to coaxing the baron from the cabin as Gordo entered and stood scratching his head in perplexity. Fury made De Banana stutter so that he could not articulate.

Basil, at the other end of the table, had leaped to his feet. His sword belt hung on a wall peg and was out of his reach. He was unarmed and at their mercy, and knew De Banana had chosen this opportunity for a last, determined attack on his life.

He waited, breathing hard, while Gordo summoned the boson, and they advanced one along each side of the heavy table.

Suddenly Basil ducked under the board, caught a leg of each man and sent them sprawling on their backs. Then, diving between the braced apart legs of De Banana and upsetting him, Basil leaped for the companion steps.

On deck he swarmed to the fore rigging, calling a warning to Jack Butts to have a care. Gefondo raced after him as if to assist in his capture, as Basil took the ratlines and hauled aloft to the crow's nest.

With incredible speed the hunchback came aloft, and, at a thud Basil saw a brace of pistols dropped in the cask lashed to the mast which served the lookout.

"Hit me. Knock me to the deck!" muttered Gefondo. Basil made a pretense of struggling with him and sent him hurtling from his precarious footing.

But Gefondo was like an ape. His long arms and legs grasped backstays, halyards, and anything he could reach, and he swung himself down, muttering that he would not again face that puma in the crow's nest for any captain's bidding.

Basil remained where he was, a pistol in each hand trained menacingly down on pirates gathered around their captain, who foully cursed them because they would not risk a shot from Trelawney's guns.

"Pick off the swine with a musket ball," suggested one man.

De Banana shook his head violently. "Diablo, no! He shall hang. Lay aloft, you dogs, and fetch him down."

Not a man moved toward the rigging. Instead, they stood grumbling loudly their dislike of leaden slugs, especially now within sight of land.

With a wary eye on the pirates below, and every sense alert, Basil snatched glances at the sea, and his breath caught as he saw the blue and lavender haze which wreathed the mountains of Santo Domingo.

On the very top of one hill, like a ship's prow headed toward the mag-

netic north, its eastern wall as clean cut as a slab of granite, was the citadel fortress of Henri Christophe, the marvel of the western world.

Along the indented shore line was the town of Cap François, all white and pink. Beyond, emerald verdure stretched to the blue-misted hills, and just ahead of the ship was a white-winged cutter beating out to sea, to meet *Le Diable Noir*.

On deck the grumbling and cursing had changed to open threats which prophesied mutiny as *De Banana* continued to loudly demand the capture of the thief. Still, Basil was not greatly afraid now. Quarreling men make poor antagonists.

He was waiting for a moment when their wits would suggest the expedient of musketry trained on his perch aloft. He knew they could eventually capture him, although he might kill and wound a few. He sighed; he was so-near *Violette*, and yet so far away.

Le Diable Noir showed fast heels to the free wind. High in his perch over the dizzy sea Basil swayed and wished it were still higher and that he might be tossed far out as a sling casts a stone.

The wish was father to a thought which grew and spread. He saw the boat which had put out from the harbor, white sailed and manned by a dark skinned crew. It floated colors he had never seen before, and a small figure-head of gold which glistened in the sun.

"Sail ho!" he cried below, a note of impudent gayety in his voice.

Immediately they saw the cutter and there was a fresh confusion.

"The emperor's craft!" came the hoarse cry of *Gordo-the-Butt*.

De Banana seemed overwhelmed by the news and the immediate need of preparing to receive the emissary of Henri Christophe. Basil realized that he would be reserved for being taken prisoner when that visit was over.

And ever *Le Diable Noir* came near-

er port with a fair wind and flooding tide. He puzzled his brain to know how he could escape this cul-de-sac into which he had climbed.

The sun, already dropping toward the western sea when he came on deck, slipped down like a plate of molten brass into gold-rimmed blueness.

Night, swift winged in the tropics, tossed her sable scarf of lace, star-gemmed, while the speedy little cutter with flapping sails came into the wind as a boat was lowered.

The crew of *Le Diable Noir* hurried about tasks more to their liking than fetching this treed usurper of the peace down on deck. Themselves thieves, they knew the ridiculousness of quibbling over the theft Basil assumed.

For *De Banana* had howled his loss to the winds—a woman's face on ivory! Not a man on board would have treasured such a thing, except if it might be bartered for rum. For now they were near port, and there were women aplenty to smile on seamen.

Also, since they had been vastly entertained by *Trelawney's* songs and dances, now that the cruise was over it was a poor stomach they brought to the task of hanging him with port joys in sight.

Fate, the jade, having found a puppet to her liking, was playing pranks with young Basil *Trelawney*.

CHAPTER VIII.

VOODOO.

ON deck the pirates of *Le Diable Noir* awaited the arrival of the cutter's small boat. The Baron *de Banana* had donned a cloak of ermine over his gaudy velvets, and in the yellow lights his face shone with dripping sweat.

Basil saw him wipe his chin with a curved forefinger and fling away the drops. He saw also that foremost of those ascending the rope ladder of the

pirate vessel was a huge negro dressed in scarlet velvet and gold lace before whom the baron bowed low and addressed as "My Lord of Marmalade."

Accompanying this dandy were black men in weirdly different trappings of brilliant colors, who stood pompously rigid while the Lord of Marmalade asked questions under which De Banana squirmed and talked in an apologetic whine.

He seemed to be having a bad half hour. Presently he led the way below, and Basil thought they were probably gone to inspect the Trelawney guns in the hold.

No one seemed to give a thought for Basil aloft, but he did not for a moment relax his vigilance. Soon he saw a dark form creeping cautiously toward his roost. He leaned forward, his pistol cocked, when he heard the voice of Gefondo whisper:

"Can swim, young master? Then try it. I'll go along to lead the way. And Jack Butts sends you word that he'll stand by to cover your escape."

Without waiting to reply, Basil shoved the pistols in his belt and followed Gefondo down to the foreyard. Out on that long spar both men crawled to the yardarm, from which Basil was sentenced to dangle when he was caught. Looking down, he saw the big blond head of Jack Butts below him at the rail.

There was no moon, no light on the sea except the broken silver twinkles of reflected stars. Trelawney took a deep breath, stripped off his coat, then, folding his hands together, dropped forward in so clean a dive that he scarcely made a splash. Coming to the surface, he saw another shadowy form jump from the yardarm, and also saw Jack Butts swing a leg over the rail.

But Jack was not to escape so easily. Some one had seen him, and knowing the punishment which would be meted out to the crew for allowing Butts to take French leave, and perhaps

suspecting what took him overboard, a shout rang out, and a seaman leaped at Jack, but too late to halt him.

The big fist of the Cornishman shot out and met sensual lips. His antagonist sprawled on deck. Then Jack was in the sea, threshing the water like a grounded whale, as he overtook those fluttering streams of phosphorescence which marked the wake of Basil and Gefondo.

"That paddler astern," muttered the hunchback at Basil's shoulder, "will draw their fire and prove our death. Swim under water, young master."

Basil heard shots and the whine of lead bullets overhead. He ducked his head and swam under the surface so long as he could. But the pirate crew were better cutlass hands than pistol marksmen, and the frilled light of that strange sea fire seen in tropic waters at which they aimed was far astern of the swimmers.

So their bullets missed the men who churned the pretty trail. Butts, Gefondo, and Basil then swam abreast into the deeper shadow of overhanging trees on shore.

They saw the lights of Cape François farther down the coast, but the hunchback, whose commands were now obeyed, led them to the nearest point of land, for Basil was growing weary and his breath rasped in his throat.

He wallowed deep and his legs dragged heavily from his hips. His arms seemed weighted like lead before the big hand of Jack Butts grabbed him and he felt the Cornishman's shoulder heave to support his breast.

"Rest, youngster; we have all night to make shore," he said.

"And only sharks to fear," the hunchback managed to sneer. "Don't play the fool or weakling now that we have reached shore."

Butts heaved Basil on his back, and, clutching the clustering curls of the boy's head, towed a half drowned and altogether exhausted youth. In some

way they did reach shore, a dark beach where flower perfume was stiflingly sweet and heavy.

Basil was hauled to a verdant couch, and both men rubbed warmth again into his flesh and pumped his arms until the lungs took up their task and the laboring heart was eased of its battle for life.

From the pockets of his trousers the hunchback drew a flask of cognac and held it to Basil's lips, then he cursed. "Small wonder he almost sank. Pistols still belted to his body, waterlogged and useless."

"I'll clean them, come morning," said Butts, and, pillowing the boy's head on his arm, he slept.

Dawn came in pearl light flowing over the hills. Songs of birds awakened them. The sun touched their faces with hot fingers of light. They had crept deep into jungle fringing the shores, and peering between the branches they saw *Le Diable Noir* floating on water so clear that she seemed held aloft on air.

There had evidently been no search for the runaway men, and Basil judged it was because *De Banana* dared not let it be known that his carelessness had loosed an Englishman or two on the island; nor would he be likely to report to *Henri Christophe* the truth about Basil Trelawney.

No doubt the baron was uneasy at Basil's disappearance. But there was the all-important business of unloading the guns. Basil pondered long on the way he should take to get the promised gold for his father. He still clung to that determination to be paid in full for the guns of Trelawney.

Gefondo had dived into the thickets and returned with fruit; ripe pineapples oozing juice, large avocados, and smaller fruit strange to both Englishmen. They ate ravenously, and if the meal lacked solidity they were at least full stomached. Then Basil ruefully regarded his gray satin waistcoat now spoiled with sea water.

"I'm scarce presentable to visit a king," he said. "Where can I buy garments fitting such a visit of ceremony?"

"A coffin shop would serve appropriately," sneered the hunchback. "It would save time to leap back into the sea now. You'll never see the court of *Henri Christophe*, young master."

"Oh, yes, I will, and demand from him the money due my father for his guns. Let's find a garment shop in the town."

But Gefondo paid him no more attention than a child would get. He climbed a tall tree with the lithe agility of a monkey, and from its branches looked abroad, then dropped lightly to earth.

"I see a trail that we shall follow." Gefondo led the way, and the others followed with difficulty because much of it was traversed on low hanging tree branches to escape the lush tangle of vines that were matted like webs, and the darting streaks of shining green snakes hurling themselves at the intruders.

"*Fer de lance*," Gefondo said grimly when once he jerked his leg from a coiled serpent. "They are certain death. And those centipedes and scorpions cause death. Some of these creepers are also poisonous, and a man needs to watch carefully."

"It's like a painted hell," said Jack Butts, sweat streaming down his face. The air was hot and moist. It was some time before they reached the trail Gefondo had seen, a faint dividing line in the green jungle creepers, trodden but not worn down by feet which had passed before them. There were toe-marks of men in soft places.

Where the trail branched two ways, they halted, undecided which way to turn. Night was not far distant. Basil was already irritated by the rasp of sea-salt and sweat on his arm-pits and thighs, and they had found nothing to drink, although fruit served to moisten their lips and throats.

"We'll toss a coin," said Gefondo. "Heads, we take the right turn." He flipped a coin spinning into the air and looked up to watch its flight, then down as it fell on his palm. Then his eyes met the gaze of Basil and Jack Butts.

They had all seen a black face peering through the leafy tree branches, a face like a hideous mask, for between its dark lips was a black hole where a tongue had been torn out by the roots!

"God's mercy! What purgatory is this?" muttered Butts. But Gefondo had darted down the right hand path and the others followed him, and only halted when Gefondo barred their way.

"Go softly," he warned. "I smell the smoke of wood fire that betokens we are nearing a plantation."

Between the trees they could see a hillside laid out in sugar cane and trim rows of wide-spreading pineapple leaves. And, nestling in a green dimple of sloping valley, was a broad, scattered building whose ornate decorations Basil at once recognized as French architecture.

For so large a place it looked sadly deserted. He could fancy it had once had hundreds of field workers, and women's dresses brightening the lawns, but there was none left. Smoke curled from one chimney of the house, but green shutters at its windows were shattered, and hung by one hinge or gaped wide.

Near the fence a man paced up and down, a musket over his shoulder, a red loin-cloth about his hips, another scarlet rag around his head. From a further fence overgrown with rose-vines, came a second guard. Imitating Gefondo, Basil flipped a coin, saying:

"Heads we visit this house; tails we go to town." A second time the head on the coin came up, but Gefondo swore and vowed the boy should not imperil them all by his foolishness. Basil turned to face the hunchback, his blue eyes snapping with anger.

"You've called me 'master,' Gefondo. I demand full meaning of that

name." Gefondo spread his hands and bowed, but his face wore a sneer.

"I know this land and you do not. We'll wait until night."

With good nature quickly returned, Basil dropped into a thick loop of vine, swinging back and forth, fanning insects from his face while Jack Butts slapped viciously and his countenance became smeared with his own blood where mosquitoes bit deep.

It was this irritation at the stinging pests that came near to their undoing, for in the jungle silence the sound of Jack Butts's protestations carried farther than they knew, and one guard at the plantation house halted at the end of his beat to listen, then swung the gun to his shoulder and fired into the thicket which concealed them.

Instantly the plantation house spewed forth black soldiers who had been out of sight, and without waiting to take council the three wanderers fled in time to escape the scattered shots which showered leaves and twigs on their heads and shoulders.

Basil wondered that they were not pursued. Then he remembered the gargoyle faces in the trees. No doubt these black soldiers had seen the tongueless man and fired at him, never dreaming that there were others hiding.

Following at Gefondo's heels, Basil came to less tangled ground skirting the shore, and caught glimpses of the sea. On the far line where sky meets ocean they saw the sails of a ship, no larger at that distance than a white-winged butterfly. It brought to Trelawney a wave of homesickness, the first wild longing for that gray stretch of water off the cliffs of Trelawney.

The momentary pang recalled to him the reason for his presence on this island. He thought of Violette, and plunged on, determined to reach the town where he might make inquiries for the Marquis de Tourraine.

And presently lights were seen, popping out like gems on the brow of a creole. There was prodigal waste of

lamp-oil in Cap François that night, and Gefondo sought to account for it.

"No doubt that blaze is a fire in the public square," he said. "And it is quite likely that Henri Christophe is in the town."

They hurried on. Basil still clung to the idea that he might gain an audience with the black emperor. He had out-stripped Gefondo and raced on until they reached a road, where their pace slowed to a walk.

They passed black women bearing hampers of fruit on their heads, bodies as sinuous as serpents; and laughing, white-toothed black men beside them.

The grins changed to scowls at sight of the strangers, and tempered even Basil's impudent courage. For they saw in the dark faces the hatred of all white men, and to Trelawney there came a memory of his childhood when he listened to tales of horror told of the reign of terror in France when news came that Louis XVI was beheaded and more dreadful, the fate of his queen, Marie Antoinette.

White men, Frenchmen, had done such things to their own race. Basil regarded the blacks as men caught in the maelstrom of revolution, irresponsible murderers, instruments of fate which seemed to favor the cause of the mob.

There was need of caution. They came to the fringes of the town, huts and small houses hidden deep in flaming bougainvillæa and poinciana trees, and here Gefondo led them up a lane dark shadowed by overhanging trees, where pigs scuttled out of their path, and children, naked as black Cupids, played and yelled.

Gefondo led them through a gate sunk in a wall and to a door on which he tapped lightly. It opened and a negress stared at them all, then reached for Gefondo's arm and drew him inside.

He summoned Butts and Trelawney by a gesture, then closed the door. They stood in a kitchen where fire from an

open hearth lighted the walls and clean scrubbed table, and the negress flung her arms about the hunchback, speaking in a language which smacked of both French and Spanish, yet which Basil, who knew both tongues, did not understand.

She used endearing terms as to a child, and Gefondo bore her embraces, then spoke rapidly, evidently explaining who his companions were. Before the fire were spits turned by a small black boy on which chickens browned slowly, their juices dripping into a platter of golden yams and batter cake.

Weary to exhaustion, Basil dropped on a bench, and Gefondo assumed again the attitude on board ship, fetching him a calabash in which water, lemon juice, and sugar were mixed to make a refreshing drink.

"Here, we are safe and may rest. Chilena shall watch for you while I seek for garments befitting a Trelawney, young master. But venture not abroad until I return. There's a bed, if you would rest."

"I want to wash and sleep most of all in the world," Basil sighed. Gefondo explained his need, and the negress led Trelawney to an outroom with a tub. She carried water in buckets and filled it, then brought him undergarments so fine that Basil fingered them with delight.

Bathed and dressed, he stretched on a cot, and the negress pulled curtains of cotton netting about him and closed the window shutters.

He slept for some time and awakened in darkness. He could hear distant shouting of voices and sound of cheering. By the candle burning in another room opening off the one where he lay, he saw fine garments of blue satin, silk hose, and a brave hat with a plume.

Dressing quickly he went to the window and threw open the shutters. Light blazed somewhere, for its reflection tinted the darkness. Basil decided to explore the town because he was weary

of surveillance, and there was no sign of Butts or Gefondo about. He stepped from the window and went down the alleyway to a cross-road.

Crowds thronged the streets of Cap François. Basil followed the laughing, shouting black people and found their course led toward the sea-front. By lights gliding against the stars and dark waters of the harbor, he knew a ship had entered and cast anchor, and he remembered the vessel he had seen at sundown.

No one paid him more than passing attention. It seemed as if the populace made a ceremonial of the arrival of this vessel. Basil saw her lights, red and green at the bows, and lanterns strung like shining, yellow garlands on deck. At her mizzen-truck floated the tricolor of France.

"Dear God," he breathed aloud, "a French ship, and all this vast fuss to greet her. What can be the meaning?"

Along the wharf a company of soldiers in uniform of red and blue slashed with gold braid stood stiffly at attention. In the center of an open square facing the quay, a great fire of logs leaped and showered flame-light and sparks.

Palm sabers caught the yellow gleams. The ruddy glow shone on muskets; it illumined black faces and threw into sharp relief the magnificent figure of a huge negro clad in shining satin, a cloak of purple velvet lined with scarlet about his shoulders, and on his head a crown of glittering jewels surmounted by twisted yellow satin like a turban on which diamonds winked and blazed.

His breast was covered with ribbons and medals. A rope of pearls hung to his knees. His dark eyes were piercingly bright in their white settings. His thick red lips were parted, revealing splendid white teeth. Diamonds shone on his black fingers.

Basil gazed, spell-bound by the malignant gorgeousness of Henri Christophe, the negro who had lifted himself from the lot of a common slave to become Emperor of Haiti.

Banners fluttered from pike-staffs held by the soldiers. At one side of the square were a number of coaches with matched barbs pawing the earth and tossing their red and blue plumes. Silver harness chains chimed; coachmen and postilions clad in red and blue sat with arms folded on their chests.

Lines of soldiers held back the crowd with drawn bayonets and formed a barrier nearly to the quay, where the crowd shoved close as a boat was lowered from the French ship.

Basil ran to the quay edge and gazed across the dark sea. From shore, broke a song of welcome in deep-throated musical voices, a wild barbaric pæan whose rhythm stirred the blood to increasing tempests.

He saw a man standing in the boat with his head bared. Light shone on the silver hair and Basil recognized a nobleman of France whose hand he had taken in happier times, the Marquis de Tourraine. Sitting near him, was a white-robed girl with golden hair.

All this parade was meant to celebrate her arrival. Basil knew before he glimpsed her features who it was. His young heart leaped, then contracted in the grip of fear. Violette had arrived; but to such a welcome that he had rather seen it changed to her funeral.

He wondered if there were not some way to intercept her and warn her father of the fate awaiting them, but the crowd hemmed him in and held him fast. Black people pressed close, muttering in growling tones about her fairness, and laughing at ribald speeches in their own island tongue.

Basil managed to shove forward as the boat landed, but immediately the crowd came between and he lost sight of her. It was some moments before she again came into view sitting in a sedan chair of painted gold carried by four huge blacks in barbaric dress.

Lights shone on her golden hair and her white face in which her eyes seemed like shadows. Basil battled the

crowd to get nearer. He was unaware of the growling imprecations directed at himself, until a great black hand caught his shoulder.

Then, he only resented that touch because it held him from rushing to Violette, but he struck out with both fists working like flails, wrenched himself clear, and plunged before the chair, panting and disheveled after his mauling, and with the crowd pressing after him and only held in check by the soldiers who closed in the moment after he had gone by.

The girl half-rose from the chair cushions and stared at this disturber of the parade, then she cried out, half in fear, half mad with joy:

"Basil! Basil Trelawney! To find you here!"

He caught the fingers she extended toward him and bowed, lifting them to his lips.

"Sweet maid, I come to claim you for my own," he panted, unable in that brief moment to disclose his fears of the plans the emperor had made for her disposal. "Violette, tell them that we are promised, that you are my betrothed—for there is danger for you here.

"Claim me and admit my claim on you, so they will not present you beyond all recalling with another husband. My sweet, your very honor is in peril in this place!"

One hand clutched at the lace around her throat, and one remained in his fingers. She had seen perilous times in France. She had known women of royal blood wed with peasants to save their necks from the guillotine, and she rose to the occasion like the gallant young royalist woman, she was.

"Walk beside me, Basil. Seem to have been awaiting me. And keep hold of my hand. Kiss it if you will. I'll demand your attendance wherever they take me. I'll claim you for my promised husband, but tell me quickly, what the peril is?"

The very boldness of his action

saved Trelawney from being torn from her chair by soldiers. It was as if he had been expected for the procession and had arrived late.

So topsy-turvy a world had existed on Santo Domingo that the crowd accepted it as a part of the show and the soldiers, knowing nothing different, allowed him to walk beside her chair, looking more handsome than he realized.

His coat and knee breeches were of palest blue satin with a waistcoat of grape color edged with silver lace. From his shoulders hung a black cloak lined with white satin. His hat brim sagged with heavy plumes. Not even the commanding figure of the emperor was more resplendent. The procession moved slowly, and Basil spoke hurriedly:

"I came only yesterday. On my ship I learned that your arrival here was expected, and that they planned to wed you to a mongrel, named Baron de Banana."

At that name, she laughed. She could laugh in the shadow of such a menace! It showed him better than he had ever known the fine temper of her spirit, the splendid quality of her courage.

"He is half brute, half negro; God alone knows what else. But I got ashore and am here to meet you, my sweet, and do what I may to help you—and keep you for my own."

His face was pale, strangely white in that dark company. Beside this golden girl he walked like a young king, proudly, yet with tender concern. And she—

"By the Eternal, but you are beautiful and brave!" he said. "My heart has left my breast and flown to your keeping. All life and love, all hopes of heaven and joy beyond this world, are wrapped in your smile, my Violette."

Speaking of love under the very shadow of death and worse than death—the pity, the splendor of it! But that

was youth and that was love in those dreadful times.

At the street end, in the square, Emperor Henri Christophe waited, a great commanding figure, clad in scarlet not more red than the rivers he had set flowing down those streets, rivers of the blood of white men and women and even babes. He scowled as he saw the chair turn and between him and the French girl obtruded the gallant figure of this boy who held her soft white hand.

When an attendant sprang forward to open the chair door, Basil stepped in front of him and swung it wide. Violette rested her fingers on his hand and stepped daintily to the crimson carpet laid before the emperor. Her white silk petticoats spread like petals of a huge flower as she curtsied. Her soft fair lashes lay for an instant on her cheeks, then were lifted.

As she caught a full view of the imposing blackness of Henri Christophe, Basil felt her fingers clutch his hand and saw her shrink from that figure so repellent in its wealth of color and jewels.

The eyes of Christophe gloated on her tiny, satin-shod foot and slender silk-clad ankle. As he looked full in her face, his lips parted in a broad grin, and he moistened them with his tongue. It was as if he tasted something piquantly pleasant.

Violette's own eyes were horror-filled. She shrank back to the chair door, her free hand caught at its frame and she swayed in sudden faintness. For Christophe had stalked forward and held out his hand for her to kiss!

"Dieu! I cannot," Basil heard her murmur; he saw the white pallor of her face and lips, and the sudden limpness of her body.

Quick as a flash he caught her in his arms and lifted her to lie over his shoulder, a soft, lifeless burden, shocked from the joyous reunion with the man she loved, into unconscious-

ness, at the shock of that command she had neither will nor power to obey.

"My Lady the Marquise de Tournaine has fainted at the sight of your magnificence, royal highness," said Basil in French to the emperor. "I pray that you will grant me permission to carry her to her quarters."

CHAPTER IX.

WITH CAP AND BELLS.

TORCHES flared beside the road and crowds cheered as the procession went by. Basil Trelawney sat in the sedan chair with Violette beside him, and he realized that their carriage was part of a gorgeous cavalcade of which the most dazzling splendor was the Emperor Christophe.

He felt as if he had been trapped and held in the power of some medieval monster who would plot torments for Violette and himself. She lay against his shoulder, a perfumed sweetness. He chaffed her small wrists with his hands and pressed the lace closer against her small cold cheek.

The faintness had passed quickly. His arm tightened about her, and lifting her head she laid her cheek against his cheek in the first voluntary caress she had ever given him.

"Basil—tell me it has all been an evil dream. Assure me that none of it is true. Oh, I have been so terribly afraid!"

His two arms held her close. 'And gripping him in turn, were those tumultuous emotions, of happiness and fear.

"You will not fear with me beside you, dear. It is because the emperor is a black man, a giant, that he frightened you."

He had saved her from that ordeal of touching her lips to Christophe's blood-stained hand. He had claimed her before the emperor as his "lady," his wife, and the falseness of that as-

sertion might be discovered at any moment.

"There is not time to tell you of the danger now, Sweet! But I have said that you are my own, my dear wife. Best not deny it. Let them think we had a runaway marriage in Rouen. For only as my wife can you escape the marriage they plan for you here, with a man half black and wholly foul.

"Promise, Violette—and some day we will seek a consecration to seal the vows we said in happier days."

"Your wife," she murmured. "I've dreamed so sweetly of it."

Basil caught her to his heart and kissed her eyes, her throat, and her lips. He felt the answering warmth of her arms and cheeks. They could only love and wait the passing of events, and take happiness from this interlude.

"You are a friend of the emperor, Basil?" she asked.

"No, Sweet. I am only a blunderer into the realms of joy, a puppet at the court of happiness."

"You mean that you are a jester, entertaining the court with your gifts of dance and song, and wear cap and bells?"

"A cap of folly and bells of contrition, Sweet."

"Because you've made sport of the emperor, Basil?"

"Because I've let him make a fool of me so soon."

"I do not comprehend," she paused, and because he lifted her hand to his lips he had no chance to explain. For at that moment the carriage came to a sudden halt, and from its window Basil saw flaming torches outlying an avenue which led to a broad veranda, and he recognized the dilapidated villa which he had seen that day, where soldiers kept guard and the broken window shutters had not been mended.

The bridles of the carriage horses had been seized, and then had been led into the smoky light before a porte-

cochère where a crowd were gathered. Violette's hands clung to Basil and his arms held her still closer, as he recognized on the porch steps the Baron de Banana.

Some prophetic prescience warned the boy that this was the domicile of the pirate captain of *Le Diable Noir*, fallen into neglect during his absence, and now opened for his return.

He did not know why their carriage had turned into that road, but in another moment the carriage door was opened and he had descended and assisted Violette to alight. He wrapped the folds of his cloak about her slender form and stood waiting.

Between Trelawney and De Banana, recognition was mutual and unpleasant. The baron glared, then ripped out an oath.

But there came a commotion from the roadside, and a coach gaudily painted in red and gold dashed up, with the black face of Emperor Christophe leaning from its window.

"You presume to order the route of your king?" his voice boomed out. Baron de Banana cringed as from a blow. He ran down the steps sputtering an explanation. He pointed at Basil, chattering accusations, then with a desperate effort commanded his own speech:

"This lady was promised me as wife, your majesty. I have your royal word. I've waited in great impatience for this hour."

"Your impatience shall be rewarded, and no longer need you wait. The lady already has a husband, a circumstance I was not aware of when I first offered you this reward for a service you did not entirely perform."

"Did not perform?" sputtered the baron. "Eleven guns from England await unloading from *Le Diable Noir*."

"I asked for twice as many. But we will speak of that later. This lady, being wed, cannot be a part of that rich reward I offered."

"Wed?" De Banana looked at Basil in bewilderment. "If this is the man who claims her, it is a lie. He's nothing more than a renegade Englishman who joined us when I took the guns. He swam ashore yesterday or else I'd have hanged him as I planned."

"You'd have hanged an Englishman? We make no war on England. For what reason, my Lord de Banana?"

With cold fingers of dread plucking at his heart and his hair rising in apprehension, Basil was desperately plunged in confusing thoughts. He swallowed the lump in his throat, then turning a gray face to the sea of black faces about them, he saw from a carriage behind the royal coach, a man emerging and running to where Violette stood.

"What is all this confusion?" demanded the Marquis de Tourraine, his breath seeming to catch at sight of Basil. "And Trelawney—my kinsman—how come you to be at my daughter's side?"

He caught the girl's cold hand and drew her from Basil's arm.

"See!" crowed De Banana in quick triumph. "Her father's word adds weight to mine. Seize that man!" he commanded his black soldiers. "Bind him, and we'll hang him twice for this other crime."

But a new diversion came. Pushing his way through the crowd a man ran to the royal coach, and there dropped on one knee.

He was followed close behind by a second figure with gaping horrid mouth, and one hand grasping the fist of a shock-headed giant whose red hair contrasted strangely with his blackened visage.

"Gefondo!" boomed the stentorian voice of Christophe. "And the Silent One!"

"Gefondo!" repeated the hunchback, rising to his feet and gazing boldly at the emperor. "Gefondo comes from the jungle where rites of sacrifice

and ill-omened words of prophesy have been uttered by the spirits.

"Word comes that the stars are warning of strange events going forward. The wind voices tell that great care should be taken in dealing with the pale-faced rams. This man accused, is known to me your majesty.

"I brought him ashore. Fate preserved him from the drunken wrath of De Banana to scatter light and laughter in your court. His crime on board *Le Diable Noir* was a song he sang of De Banana. Hear but that roundelay, oh mighty emperor, and judge if it merits the stillings of his carols by a hempen collar."

At the words of the hunchback, faint in his ears from the rapid beating of his own heart, Basil had wit enough to observe the deference displayed by the black men around him, for Gefondo, and their fear of the tongueless horror called by Christophe, "The Silent One."

He saw the half naked wretch, from whom Violette had turned her face unable to bear the sight. He wore fresh red combs of cocks hung in a necklace. His belt of a snake's skin dangled pendant cock's-claws, and from a cord over his shoulder hung such a dreadful thing that Basil shuddered.

It was the skeleton of a child, the bones of which had been strung on cords and rattled as the Silent One moved about.

The Marquis de Tourraine stepped nearer Basil, his face gray, his eyes starting from their lids.

"*Mon Dieu!* I thought to escape the tragedies of France by coming here. I have left fear and found horror. I'll not stay. Come, Violette—we return to the ship."

But black hands barred his way, even kept him from speaking to the emperor. Father and daughter clung together, shaking like aspen leaves as Gefondo swung a long arm to brush aside the crowd so that Basil could be seen by Emperor Christophe.

"Your prettiest step, young master," whispered the hunchback, into Basil's ear. "Dance to-night, for your life, and sing that song about De Banana. 'Twill amuse the king."

Trelawney could not understand that strange power wielded by Gefondo to claim an audience. He had heard something of voodoo worship in the forests, and Jack Butts had mentioned that rite of praying sickness and even death upon a man with the wax image on board ship.

But there was no time to think. Emperor Christophe leaned both great arms on the coach window frame and looked as a black tiger might gaze at fawns which he could strike down at any instant.

Desperately pulling himself together, Basil stepped before the emperor. At the lifted hand of Gefondo a banjo was passed from the crowd to him, and he tossed it to young Trelawney.

To dance for life in the face of death! To dance and sing for more than life! This was the way fate grinned as she pulled her strings. And Basil danced, playing his own jig; danced because his voice was frozen in his throat at first.

His blue satin-clad body shone in the red flare of torches. The white-lined cloak was whipped like wings in a wind. And presently he struck up that

"Rogue's March," and was oddly aware of his own voice singing:

"Here's to the doughty Baron, he'll always be awearin'
The curls his mother handed him, the
blush a blackbird wears—"

To the end of that ridiculous song he journeyed, bitterly regretting that his impudence had ever prompted the improvisation. He was making a deadlier enemy than before of De Banana, but it amused Henri Christophe, the emperor.

His magnificent white teeth were displayed in a grin. He leaned back in the coach laughing loudly, and his laughter was taken up by the crowd, who laugh with authority or weep when it frowns.

Basil danced as he had never danced before, and his voice, if not his heart, went into the song with a will. He had been an entertaining scaramouche in Rouen when Violette and her friends wrote little playlets and staged them for sweet charity.

Some talent of mimicry that came from his mother's gift of heritage he had mastered. He danced that night to wild piping of his own heart. He *must* amuse this black emperor. He *must* find favor. Gefondo had presented to him a fighting chance. The rest lay in his own power.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



THE 220TH NOVEL, FIRST PRINTED SERIALLY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS
SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN

By A. MERRITT

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The Whistling Waddy Warbles On

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

*One man against a band of outlaws and the game of stealth
that was played in the effort to outwit them*

A SULLEN silence brooded over the sloping gray walls of the narrow cañon, a heavy listless hush, a part of the warm, sweltering August day that was swiftly passing. It was late afternoon now, and already the shadows were growing longer as the sun began to disappear behind the tall cliff to the westward.

Faintly from behind the high bowlders that stood like sentinels at the mouth of the ravine came the sound of some one whistling. The notes of the familiar strains of "Old Black Joe" thrilled mournfully through the sultry stillness as they grew steadily louder.

Beneath the sound, as though it were

a faint accompaniment, echoed the soft pounding of hoofs and the creaking of leather as a horseman slowly entered the cañon.

When he had passed the last of the jagged rocks the man halted his horse and sat motionless, staring about him. Keen blue eyes gazed thoughtfully over the scene, missing nothing which came beneath their vision, from the little clump of cottonwoods ahead to the tall gray walls which rose on either side. As he sat there, the sensitive lips were puckered as he continued to whistle the melody softly, plaintively.

"Solitaire" Stevens, known from one end of the range to the other as

the Whistling Waddy, was once again exploring new territory.

The man was an enigma to all who knew him. A quiet, taciturn individual who was reputed to be exceedingly dangerous when aroused—he wandered ever onward, pausing but seldom and never making the slightest effort to explain his actions.

He appeared to be eternally in quest of some one or something, although there was not one among the many who knew him who had ever learned the motive for his wanderings.

He had become a mounted vagabond of the trails, and it was not an indolent nature that had made him so. There were a number of ranchers who would have been glad to have Solitaire Stevens in their outfit, for he was known as a top hand and possessed a reputation as a broncho-buster as well.

Some of them had even gone so far as to offer him a job with them. But the Whistling Waddy had always smilingly declined and gone on his way.

A month ago Stevens's one and only close friend, an old prospector named Jerry Grimshaw, had been murdered by a band of outlaws just after the old desert rat had made a rich gold strike. Solitaire, returning from his wanderings on one of his periodical visits to his friend, had learned what had occurred and had avenged the deed by wiping out the three men who had killed the old prospector.

It had been a fair gun fight, and the Whistling Waddy had won, thanks to the sense of fair play shown by the leader of the trio, a man named the Eagle, who, when he saw that one of his men was about to shoot Stevens in the back, had shot the man himself and prevented the deed, although by so doing the Eagle had forfeited his own chance for life.

For awhile Solitaire had worked the rich claim which Grimshaw had found in Lost Hope Cañon, but the wanderlust had soon returned. The urge to be ever moving, to travel on had caused

the Whistling Waddy to sell out, and, after placing the greater part of the money received for the claim in the safe keeping of the bank, he had ridden on, searching for that which he alone knew as he moved over the vast ranges of the old West—ever whistling and alone.

Solitaire ceased whistling abruptly as he heard a slight sound beyond the clump of trees in front of him. Then suddenly the roar of a gun echoed loudly from somewhere ahead.

As a bullet whistled by his head the puncher slid off his horse and drew his two heavy guns in one rapid motion. He stood now, Colt in each hand, his eyes narrowed as he gazed across his saddle toward the trees that obstructed his view of the rest of the cañon.

For a long moment after the echoes of the gun had died away there was silence—then it roared again, and with the sound came the clatter of a horse galloping in the opposite direction from where the wandering puncher stood, the hoofbeats growing steadily fainter until they died away. Again silence, grim, ominous hung over the ravine.

Stevens waited patiently. He was not one inclined to make sudden or foolish moves at a time like this, for his was a cool and cautious nature.

He continued to stare about him, watching all sides. Growing tense as he heard a crashing among the trees, he trained his guns in the direction of the sound.

The noise grew louder, then a figure appeared amid the trees and moved toward the Whistling Waddy. It was a white-haired man who approached, staggering weakly.

As he drew nearer, Solitaire saw that his face was lined with pain, and blood was oozing slowly down his gray flannel shirt from a spot near his heart.

He was within ten feet of Stevens now, and as he caught sight of the puncher the elderly man shuddered and paused.

"He got me, damn him," he muttered with an effort. "The Ace wins this time. The—Ace—wins—"

With a groan the man plunged forward on his face and lay there motionless.

For an instant Solitaire stood gazing at him, then, with a swift glance about him, the Whistling Waddy moved toward the still form. As he did so he placed his guns back into the two well-worn holsters that he wore tied low on either hip.

When he reached the other Stevens leaned over and examined him. It took but a minute for him to be convinced that the man was dead.

The Whistling Waddy stood up, a frown that bore ill for some one upon the strong face beneath the brim of the worn black Stetson.

"The Ace wins," he repeated. "Huh, reckon I'm gonna play a hand or two in this little game! Yuh can beat an ace if yuh got the right cards!"

He began to whistle softly as he once again knelt to examine the man on the ground, hoping to find some sort of identification, and there was a deadly note of warning in that plaintive tune.

II.

OVER the little cow town of Vereston the bright stars gleamed placidly in the tranquil sky of the summer night. Lights shining through the windows of the rough wooden buildings cast yellow squares upon the one and only street of which the place boasted.

Solitaire Stevens glanced about him quite casually as he rode along the dusty thoroughfare, the possessions of the dead man in his pocket. Though he seemed quite indifferent to his surroundings, the keen eyes of the Whistling Waddy were taking in all the details of the vicinity, and he was very much alert.

Solitaire had a mission, and that was to learn all he could about a person called the Ace.

He halted his horse at the hitching rail of the Trail's End Saloon. As he dismounted he noticed that there were already five cow ponies hitched to the rail, and he fastened his mount at the extreme end of the string.

"Yuh're a stranger here, ain't yuh?" said a small voice from the rough boardwalk that ran across the front of the saloon.

Solitaire glanced swiftly in that direction, hands near his guns, then smiled as he caught sight of a small, freckled-face boy. He was dressed in a ragged shirt and a pair of worn overalls, and he sat on the edge of the walk, his bare feet dangling in the dust.

"Reckon yuh guessed it, son," Stevens laughed, and then held out his hand as he moved closer to the boy. "My name's Stevens—what's your brand?"

"Jimmy Lawton," The boy leaped to his feet, obviously delighted at being considered an equal, and took the extended hand. "Glad to meet yuh, Mr. Stevens." An anxious look passed over his face. "Say, yuh want to be careful 'round here; th' pack ain't got much of a welcome for strangers!"

"Thanks, Jimmy," said Solitaire gravely. "Who do yuh mean by th' pack?"

"Why—" the boy glanced about nervously, as though afraid of being overheard, then added softly: "Th' pack is th' Ace's gang. They're a bad bunch."

"The Ace, eh?" The Whistling Waddy's tone was casual, though he was deeply interested. "Who's th' Ace?"

"I—" Jimmy glanced up the street and caught sight of two riders approaching swiftly. "Gee, here comes Craven and Jenkins—I gotta go. See you later, Mr. Stevens."

Before Solitaire could speak the boy dashed around the corner and disappeared. The puncher frowned and then moved into the bar of the Trail's End.

"Sour Grapes" Watson, the thin, sad-faced barkeeper, glanced up as Stevens moved to the bar and ordered a drink. Watson looked the puncher over, and decided that the stranger did not appear a very exciting person. Sour Grapes was not of a very observing nature.

Solitaire examined the occupants of the room in the big mirror behind the bar. They appeared to be five of the usual weather-beaten, hard riding waddies of the range and nothing more.

His observations completed, Stevens turned his attention to the barkeeper as the latter placed a drink before him.

"Been right warm tuhday, ain't it?" remarked Solitaire casually.

"Sure has," answered Watson, polishing the bar with a grimy rag. "Don't know when I seen so much heat as there's been this summer—this month's been a scorcher!"

"Yea," Stevens nodded as he picked up his glass. "Anything doing in this town?"

"Nope," the barkeeper shook his head. "But then there never is! Vereston ain't what yuh could call excitin'. 'Course there's some hombies 'round here that always start somethin'—"

Watson ceased speaking abruptly as two men swaggered through the doorway. The Whistling Waddy observed the new arrivals carefully in the mirror.

The first to enter was a heavy-set man, his face disfigured by a twisted nose and whose lips appeared to be curved into a perpetual sneer. Stevens noticed that a heavy pearl-handled revolver hung from a holster on his left hip.

His blue flannel shirt was open at the throat, revealing a bull-like neck that seemed too short for the big head that rested upon it.

Behind him came a little swarthy individual with long black hair and a knife sticking in his belt on the opposite side from his holster, in which a

Colt rested. He walked with catlike steps, and he gazed about the room through shifty, narrow eyes. He was evidently a half-breed of some sort.

Solitaire realized these were the two men who had been riding down the street, and who had caused the little boy to run away.

Craven and Jenkins, the kid had said their names were. Instinctively the wandering puncher felt that these two were members of the Ace's pack.

The heavy-set man moved toward the bar, and, turning to say something to his companion, he bumped into Solitaire as he did so. He muttered an oath and stood glaring at the Whistling Waddy.

The latter had turned and was gazing at him calmly—his eyes cold and hard.

"Yuh oughta look where yuh're goin'," said Stevens softly.

"Yea." The heavy-set man laughed shortly and without mirth. "Maybe yuh better get out of th' way when yuh see me coming—they usually does for 'Hasty' Craven."

"Me, I'm kinda funny that way," rejoined Solitaire quietly. "I gotta have a good reason for movin'—I've heard a lot of jaspers spoutin' hot air in my time."

"Why, yuh—" Craven fairly sputtered with rage, he reached for his gun.

As he did so Stevens's right fist landed upon the man's jaw with all the force of the puncher's weight behind it. Craven crumpled up in a heap and slid to the floor.

His companion made a move to draw his gun, but thought better of it when he found himself staring into the muzzle of one of Solitaire's heavy Colts, while the other covered the rest of the men in the room.

"Your friend Craven didn't get anythin' he didn't ask for," said the Whistling Waddy sharply. "So let it go at that!" He looked for a brief instant at the smaller man. "Listen, feller. I don't know who yuh are—but I'm tellin' yuh this right now. I'm takin' a

hand in what's going on around here. And it looks tuh me like yuh better deal me th' Ace!"

Suddenly Solitaire began to move toward the door, his two guns covering those in the room. As he reached it he began to whistle softly, and there was a song of death in the sound as he vanished from sight.

III.

LATER that evening Solitaire Stevens sat in a little abandoned cabin on the outskirts of the town, talking to the boy, Jimmy Lawton. The puncher had hidden his horse in back of the shack, for he knew that since he had declared himself to Craven and Jenkins in the saloon the Ace and his pack would be on his trail.

The Whistling Waddy was no fool. He realized that one man against the band which had terrorized the surrounding country was exceptionally long odds, and he could only win by a game of stealth.

He had learned from his examination of the dead man in the cañon, and going over the few papers which he had found in the latter's pockets, that he was Jim Harper—and that had been all.

Later Solitaire discovered a fund of information in the little boy, for Jimmy appeared to be a very observing lad, and he had remembered all that he had seen and heard.

"Gee, Mr. Stevens," Jimmy remarked, now looking at the puncher with frank admiration in his eyes, "yuh sure gave that feller Craven an awful wallop! I was looking in through th' window and I seen yuh do it—you're a brave man—an' I'm gonna be like yuh when I grow up!"

"Huh!" Solitaire laughed. "Don't yuh go usin' me for no model, kid," he said, and yet he was pleased by the boy's candid admiration. "Say, Jimmy, yuh don't know anything 'bout a jasper named Jim Harper, does yuh?"

"Jim Harper!" The boy's tone was eager. "Why, of course, I do—I ain't seen him for a couple of days, but that don't mean nothin'." Jimmy smiled. "Yuh see, he's my uncle—he's been like a father tuh me ever since my dad died 'bout four years ago. He owns th' Cross X ranch—and it's sure one fine place."

"Your uncle, eh?" said Solitaire very quietly. "He ever had any trouble with th' Ace's pack?"

"Oh, sure." Jimmy's eyes gleamed with pride. "They been after him a lot—that feller Craven offered to buy th' Cross X once, but Uncle Jim just laughed at him—and called him a crook, an' told him that th' pack would get th' ranch over Uncle Jim's dead body." The boy laughed. "Uncle sure is brave—I'm glad that I'm named after him—they called me Jim for him, yuh know."

"I see," said Solitaire very thoughtfully. "Jimmy, who do yuh reckon th' Ace really is?"

"I don't know—leastwise, I ain't sure—but I'll bet yuh it's that feller Craven."

A frown passed over the boy's freckled face.

"Say, Mr. Stevens, now yuh mention it I wonder could anything have happened tuh Uncle Jim? He said for me tuh stay right here in this old cabin till he returned, and that he had some mighty important business tuh take care of right away. But he's been gone more than three days now—and he don't usually stay away that long."

A vision of the still figure he had left back there in the cañon that afternoon rose before the puncher and he shook his head slowly.

"Son," he said slowly, "yuh an' me are gonna be pardners, ain't we?"

"Pardners?" Jimmy looked at him eagerly. "Oh, I'd sure like that, Mr. Stevens!"

"Forget th' 'mister,' kid. Folks calls me Solitaire when they knows me. Remember that, Jimmy."

"All right, Mr.—Solitaire."

"Jimmy." The Whistling Waddy's tone was very gentle. "Your uncle ain't comin' back no more."

"Yuh—yuh mean they got him?" A look of terror passed over the boy's face. "Oh, Solitaire!" He tried so hard to be brave, but after all he was only thirteen. "That—that damn Ace!" Suddenly his face quivered and the tears began to run down his cheeks. "Uncle Jim—Uncle Jim—" he murmured brokenly.

"Buck up, son."

And Jimmy found the strong arm of Stevens about his shoulders.

"Pardners, I said, kid," murmured Solitaire, and there were traces of tears in his eyes as he realized the depths of the boy's grief. "And I'm sure glad I took a hand in this deal!"

IV.

"HASTY" CRAVEN was in a rage. His was a sullen nature at best and to have been so coolly knocked out in front of the patrons of the Trail's End Saloon was far from soothing to his dignity. That his half-breed henchman had not been able to get the drop on the quiet stranger added all the more to Craven's anger.

It was a little over an hour after the deed had happened and now the heavy-set man was out for blood. He moved along the street of Vereston with one purpose in his mind. He was going to annihilate the calm two-gun waddy who had punched him on the jaw.

As he had regained consciousness there on the floor of the barroom Craven had heard Solitaire whistling as the latter made his exit. The musical notes which had issued from Stevens's lips added insult to injury as far as the badman was concerned.

Now as he moved cautiously along the dimly lighted street, Craven fairly seethed in his rage. Punch him in the jaw and then whistle, would he? He'd show that jasper a thing or two!

It might have been observed that the street was quite deserted at the present time. There was a reason for this, a very excellent reason.

Hasty Craven had announced that he was going gunning for the fresh stranger. The citizens of Vereston had heeded the warning. They were remaining carefully under cover until the shooting was over.

About twenty yards behind Craven a figure flitted silently along amid the shadows. As usual, Ed Jenkins was in the background, waiting to come to his partner's aid should his services be needed.

Suddenly Craven stopped abruptly and reached for his gun. To his left, on the opposite side of the street, he had heard some one whistling loudly and musically.

He drew the weapon and peered intently at the buildings across the way, but they were dark and shadowy, and he could see nothing. Then as he thought he saw a figure move at the side of a shed his gun roared.

It was answered by a spurt of flame from a building behind him. Craven let out a howl of pain and grabbed a wrist in which a bullet had torn a fleshy wound as it knocked the gun from his hand.

Jenkins rushed into the fray, his gun barking loudly. Then he, too, howled and fell to the ground—a bullet in his leg.

As he did so he heard, as did Craven, a softly whistled tune to his left. As the sound died away it was echoed from the other side of the street.

Solitaire Stevens, safe in the shadows of a building to the right of the two wounded men, smiled grimly. His new partner whistled right well for a kid!

V.

THE morning sun beat steadily down upon the little town of Vereston. Beneath its warm rays the jumbled collection of wooden buildings sweltered

with the heat, even though it was still early.

"Sour Grapes" Watson yawned widely as he swept the rough board-walk in front of the Trail's End Saloon with a worn broom. The yawn changed to a frown that made the thin, sad face of the barkeeper look all the more melancholy as he worked languidly, pausing now and then to mop the perspiration from his brow with a not too clean handkerchief.

"Fine job, this is!" Watson mumbled sullenly to himself as he swept. "Expect a man to work day an' night an' not get paid decent wages."

He grinned suddenly as a thought struck him. "That stranger sure put one over on Craven an' Jenkins last night! First he knocks out Craven, then he outshoots th' both of 'em when they goes gunning for him." The barkeeper frowned again. "Wonder who that feller is, anyway?"

"They says folks is kinda half-witted when they get tuh talkin' tuh themselves like that," drawled a voice from the corner of the building.

Watson turned, startled, raising the broom as though to ward off a blow. When he discovered the stranger about whom he had just been mumbling to himself he grinned sheepishly and looked exceedingly foolish as he lowered the broom.

"Yuh ought not tuh go talkin' out loud like that," stated Solitaire quietly as he rolled a cigarette. "As I heard a lawyer say once: 'Remember every word yuh say 'll be used against yuh!'"

"Aw, I didn't know there was any one around!" replied Watson, continuing his sweeping. "An' it is a hell of a job!"

"Maybe." Solitaire lit the cigarette and leaned lazily against the wall of the building. "Still there might be worse jobs"—he looked intently at Watson—"like finding a jasper when yuh don't know who yuh're looking for!"

For an instant the barkeeper looked at the Whistling Waddy as though he

were about to say something, then he shook his head and went on with his sweeping.

Stevens's attention was diverted by the sight of two horsemen who had entered the town and were riding slowly along the street toward the Trail's End.

Through half closed eyes the puncher observed the two men as they drew closer. He saw that they both appeared to be examining him intently as they dismounted at the now deserted hitching rail in front of the saloon.

The older of the two who was gray-haired and had a short gray mustache, said something to his companion, a smooth-faced individual with a hard expression. The latter glanced in Stevens's direction and nodded as though in reply to what the other had said.

As they reached Solitaire the older man paused and spoke.

"'Morning, stranger," he said.

"'Mornin'," replied Solitaire quietly.

The second man nodded, but said nothing.

"Mind tellin' me your name?" asked the older man.

Solitaire's eyes narrowed. Such direct questions were not always considered safe topics of conversation. He was very much on guard now, but he continued to lean languidly against the wall, the cigarette drooping from his lips.

"Any good reason why I should tell yuh?" he asked, his hands resting on his hips close to the butts of his two guns.

"I'm askin'—officially. I'm Sheriff Hawkner." The gray-haired man threw back his open vest and revealed his badge of office pinned to the shirt beneath. "No offense meant. We kinda check up on strangers 'round here. That's all!"

"Uh-hum!" said Stevens slowly.

Sour Grapes Watson, who had been an interested listener to the conversa-

tion, suddenly decided that his duties called him elsewhere. The barkeeper was a firm believer in self-preservation, and he had a hunch that there was going to be trouble here and now, so he moved into the saloon with more promptness than grace.

"Guess there's no reason for me not tellin' yuh who I am," said Solitaire softly. "Stevens is my name, Solitaire Stevens. They call me th' Whistling Waddy!"

"Stevens, eh?" said Hawkner. "That's what I wanted to be sure about was th' name."

His hand went swiftly to his gun, but he did not draw the weapon as he spoke. "I'm sorry, Stevens, but I've got to arrest yuh for killing Jim Harper—both Craven and Jenkins swear they saw you do it!"

"Oh, so that's it?" said Solitaire. "I mighta known them two would pull somethin' undercover—I—"

He glanced behind the sheriff and the other man. As he did so Stevens's face lighted up.

"Buck!" he exclaimed in delighted tones. "I'm sure glad tuh see yuh!"

Hawkner and his companion glanced behind them to see who Stevens was talking to and found no one there. But that brief instant had been enough for the Whistling Waddy.

When they looked again in his direction they found themselves staring into the muzzles of his heavy Colts.

"I'm right sorry, gents, that I can't oblige yuh by goin' tuh jail," said Stevens softly. "But I gotta have me a little talk with this feller called the Ace!"

He moved swiftly forward before they realized his intention and took their guns.

"If yuh wants to remain healthy," he told them, "I'd advise yuh tuh stay right where yuh are till I get out of sight."

With that he backed slowly around the corner of the building. As he disappeared the sheriff and his com-

panion heard him whistling softly and they frowned at each other.

But as yet they made no attempt to move. They felt the Whistling Waddy would carry out his threat if they did.

VI.

FOUR men rode rapidly away from the town of Vereston a little later that morning. Their faces were grimly set and they were bent upon one object, and that the capture of the soft spoken, whistler known as Solitaire Stevens.

When they had reached the shelter of a clump of trees a mile or so away from the town the quartet halted at a motion of the hand of the man who rode in the lead. Without a word they tied their bright-colored handkerchiefs tightly about the lower part of their faces, so that only each man's eyes were now visible beneath his hat.

"All set, boy?" asked the leader, turning to his companions, as he finished adjusting his mask.

"Right, chief," one of the men answered. "Let's go get him!"

The leader nodded and rode on. The others followed close behind, their eyes eagerly searching the rocky section they were entering.

Ed Jenkins, who had found the bullet which he had received the night before in his leg to be only a slight flesh wound, had been watching when Solitaire rode swiftly out of town that morning. The half-breed had made a mental note of the direction which the Whistling Waddy had taken, and now the Ace and his pack rode on an ominous mission of death.

It was toward the cañon that Stevens had appeared to be heading, and it was in this direction that the four horsemen now rode.

Behind them some considerable distance a rider followed, making every effort to keep under cover as much as possible. The little freckled faced boy Jimmy Lawton was trying to aid his new found partner.

More than once Jimmy's heart gave a nervous leap as one of the horsemen ahead turned in his saddle to say something to his companions behind him. The boy was quite sure that the man would observe that they were being trailed and that would mean trouble.

Deep within Jimmy there dwelt a great fear of the Ace and his pack, a fear instigated by Craven and Jenkins. The two men, knowing that the boy was the nephew of Jim Harper, whom they hated bitterly, had managed to make things very uncomfortable for Jimmy whenever he had been in their vicinity.

Craven had even gone so far as to strike him once, and the boy had never forgotten the blow.

Yet now he was once again risking their anger by trailing the pack in the hope that by so doing he might be able to aid his partner and hero, Solitaire Stevens.

Jimmy breathed a faint sigh of relief as the four men rode through the narrow entrance of the cañon and disappeared. The boy knew the country well, and he realized that there was no route by which the members of the pack could get to where he now waited without returning the same way in which they had gone.

An idea suddenly struck him, and a grin spread over his freckled face. He rode his little gray cow pony into the shadowy shelter of some trees and tied the animal. Then he swiftly made his way on foot to the rocky entrance of the cañon.

Once there and safely hidden in the crack between two large boulders, Jimmy began to whistle loudly and shrilly. He realized that the Ace and his men were searching for the Whistling Waddy, and that if they heard the whistling they would think it was Solitaire.

The boy hoped that if Stevens himself heard it he would realize that it was a warning from his partner.

Jimmy continued to whistle. 'At

any rate, it was a good idea, he thought—and he would carry it through.

VII.

THE Ace abruptly reined in his horse and raised his hand to those behind him as the animal came to a full stop.

"Listen," he said quietly.

All four men listened intently, and from somewhere near the mouth of the ravine through which they had just passed they heard the sound of some one whistling shrilly.

"That's him!" said one of the men. "He's just damn fool enough tuh whistle when he knows there's sure tuh be somebody on his trail!"

"Don't yuh get any funny ideas about that jasper," spoke up a member of the quartet who had remained silent till now. "He ain't as dumb as yuh think he is! He's right quiet and calm like, but he ain't wearin' them two guns tied low 'cause he thinks they're pretty ornaments—he sure can use 'em." The man laughed. "Reckon yuh oughta know that after last night, Ed!"

"Harry's right," stated the Ace. "Stevens is right dangerous—and we gotta get rid of him pronto! I ain't so sure he's workin' alone anyway—one man couldn't whistle from both sides of the street like he did last night. We better spread out, boys, an' see if we can't ambush that buzzard." The leader slid off his horse. "Leave your horses here and we'll go back after him."

Without a word the three men did as they were told. Quietly, making every effort to move without noise, they all moved back toward the entrance.

As they did so the whistler ceased his tune abruptly and a grim silence hung over the place as it basked in the heat of the summer day.

Solitaire frowned as he heard some one whistling shrilly but a short dis-

tance to his left. He was not in the most agreeable of humors anyway.

He lay flat on his chest stretched out full length upon the hard surface of a big rock which the warm sun had made decidedly uncomfortable.

He raised his head and tried to peer in the direction of the sound, but he could see nothing, for other large boulders obstructed his view.

As the whistling continued, Stevens decided that it could only come from one source, and that was the boy Jimmy. But if that was the case, what the devil was the kid doing here?

The puncher rose to his feet and stretched his cramped limbs, for he had remained in the one position for quite some time. If it was Jimmy, then it was up to Solitaire to find the boy and learn what was up.

Suiting his actions to his thoughts, the Whistling Waddy leaped down from his perch and made his way cautiously toward the sound. He was not inclined to take any chances at the present time, for he was quite sure that by now both the sheriff and the Ace and his gang were on his trail.

In fact, the more he thought about it, the more he began to wonder if the whistling might not be a clever trick on some one's part to decoy him out of hiding.

Solitaire moved noiselessly through the brush that grew below the rocks, guided by the continual whistling. At last he came to the spot where Jimmy was hidden. The boy's back was toward him and Stevens grinned as he crept closer.

"Jimmy," he called softly.

The boy turned, startled, then a look of relief passed over his face.

"Gee, Solitaire," he said, "I was gettin' worried about yuh."

"What yuh doin' here, kid?"

"Th' Ace an' his gang are in th' cañon looking for yuh," Jimmy answered. "I followed 'em, and thought I'd try and warn yuh by whistlin' if yuh was around here any place."

"The Ace, eh?" Solitaire looked very thoughtful. "I thought they'd be lookin' for me. How many of them are there?"

"Just four men," said Jimmy. "Sh—here comes somebody now!"

Solitaire ducked quickly behind a rock as he caught sight of a man with a handkerchief tied over his face moving cautiously in his direction. Swiftly the Whistling Waddy reached for his guns, then shook his head and released them quickly.

As the man came within a few feet of him Stevens leaped, and they both went down amid the brush as the man uttered a startled grunt. Sock!

The puncher's hard right fist came in abrupt contact with the man's face; it was followed by a left equally hard. The masked man sighed and then lay motionless, completely knocked out.

Solitaire pulled the handkerchief away and saw he was staring down into the battered countenance of the half-breed, Ed Jenkins.

"One in th' discard," murmured Stevens as he got to his feet.

As the Whistling Waddy stood up a second masked man appeared. He reached for his gun and a bullet flew past Solitaire's ear.

There was a roar from one of Stevens's two guns, and the man fell forward on his face, a bullet in his brain.

Solitaire moved to him and removed the improvised mask. As he did so he frowned thoughtfully. The dead man was the quiet individual who had been with the sheriff that morning.

Stevens began to whistle very, very softly. He was frankly puzzled.

VIII.

As the two shots died away in the distance the Ace turned to his companion.

"Sounds like they found him all right," he said quietly. "We better go see—yuh circle around tuh th' left an' I'll come around on th' right."

"Right, chief."

The other man moved swiftly forward toward the sound of the shooting, then turned to his left as he disappeared from sight.

The Ace moved on, and then he moved toward the right among the rocks. He had not gone far when a sharp voice rang out in front of him.

"Stick 'em up— I got yuh covered!"

The Ace started to reach for his gun, then changed his mind as he caught sight of the expression upon the face of the man who stood a short distance away, two heavy Colts held steadily in each hand, their muzzles pointing directly at the pack's leader.

"Put 'em up, I said," the man repeated sharply. "I mean what I say."

The Ace laughed shortly and without mirth, but he slowly raised his arm above his head.

"An' who in th' hell are yuh?" he asked.

"I'm Stevens," Solitaire answered. "Yuh was lookin' for me, weren't yuh? Yuh're one of the Ace's pack, ain't yuh?"

"No." The masked man shook his head. "I'm a little more important than that—I am th' Ace."

"Oh, so yuh're the big boss, eh?" Stevens grinned. "Right glad tuh meet yuh—I was hopin' I would."

"Solitaire! Look out!" came Jimmy's voice wildly. "There's a man behind yuh."

Solitaire glanced over his shoulder and caught sight of a second masked figure just reaching for his gun.

As Stevens shifted his gaze the Ace's right arm dropped with lightning swiftness. His gun roared, and Solitaire felt a warm, burning sensation across his chest.

His guns flashed in rapid succession, one in either direction.

The man behind him muttered an oath and sat down suddenly. The Ace twisted halfway around from the im-

pect of a bullet in his heart, then tottered and fell.

Solitaire moved to the man who had been behind him. The latter's mask had fallen off, and he saw that it was "Hasty" Craven who sat there rocking with pain.

"Yuh—yuh got us, damn yuh," said Craven. "But th' Ace got Jim Harper anyway, and that 'll teach that kid a lesson. He—" The bad man's eyes grew glassy and he rolled over on his side.

Stevens ran to the limp form of the Ace. Eagerly he leaned down and removed the handkerchief. Above all things he wanted to know the leader of the pack's identity.

He gave a gasp of surprise as he caught sight of the short gray mustache. The Ace was Hawkner, the sheriff!

"Well, what d'yuh know about that!" murmured Solitaire. "No wonder there ain't much law and order round here!"

Very thoughtfully the Whistling Waddy moved over to where Jimmy now stood close to Ed Jenkins, who still lay prone on the ground. As he did so Solitaire observed that the boy held Jenkins's heavy Colt in his hand.

"He started tuh come tuh," said Jimmy, grinning. "So I socked him with this an' put him tuh sleep again." He laughed. "I figured yuh was too busy tuh be bothered with him."

Stevens looked at the boy and laughed.

"Reckon th' hand's about played, pardner," he said. "We're gonna take this feller Jenkins back tuh town and make him talk right considerable tuh the folks of Vereston."

Solitaire smiled as he picked up the limp form of the half-breed and moved toward the spot where he had hidden his horse.

The smile greyed into a broad grin as he heard a noise behind him. Jimmy whistled right well for a kid.



Gold

By **KENNETH PERKINS**

Author of "The Cañon of Light," "Night Hawk's Gold," etc.

*When a good little girl was caught in the gold rush, it took quick,
red-blooded men of action to fight her battles*

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PREVIOUS PARTS

WHEN the whaling ship Cape Cod is deserted by all its crew except a harpooner named Old Joshua, in San Francisco Bay during the gold rush in 1849, Priscilla, the angelic daughter of Captain Adam Bartlett, goes ashore to find a chivalrous gambler named Jim Dorsey. In her search, she visits Steve Lukon's famous dance hall, and that astute showman engages her to sing hymns and folk melodies. When some of the mutineers under Swope, the former mate, hear that Priscilla is being showered with gold every evening, they decide to return, kill Captain Bartlett, and steal Priscilla's earnings.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHY SHE WENT.

AN infinite peace had come to the Cape Cod. The skipper, nursed during that week by his daughter and the faithful Joshua, had recovered a sufficient portion of his strength to walk the decks.

Both Joshua and the girl, however, had urged him not to go ashore until one more day. He surrendered to their

wishes without very much protest. As a matter of fact, the old sea-dog did not care about San Francisco or the gold hills. He was not a landsman. His one fervent prayer was to weigh anchor and be out again for the whaling grounds.

Meanwhile the harpooner assured him that he had had a certain amount of luck on shore. There was a small element in town who were sick to death of the misery and starvation and chol-

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era of the mining camps. They wanted to get home, and they would ship as deck hands for the mere privilege of sailing around the Horn back to their New England hills.

On the night that Swope and his three henchmen made their momentous change of plans, the skipper ate a good supper of bacon, a slice of bear meat, some biscuits, and coffee. Then he conducted evening prayers with his two faithful followers.

He petitioned the God of his forefathers for several specific blessings: he prayed that the ship would be ready to sail, he prayed for provisions, he prayed for a worthy crew, he prayed for strength so that he could sail in two more days, and he prayed for a favorable wind.

Lastly he asked the all-merciful God to provide brit enough for those whales to feed on, so that they would not wander off to new grounds.

Having thus quieted his soul, the old convalescent turned into his bunk and in ten minutes was snoring loudly.

This was the signal for Priscilla and her ancient companion to withdraw to the steerage. The week's earnings were secreted in the bottom of a big cask.

Old Joshua had the list of provisions made by the skipper which were necessary before the bark could be put on her hunt. A good many of these he had purchased, drawing prodigally upon the girl's hoard of gold dust, and these he had checked off.

"I've still got to buy three barrels of port, three hundred pump nails, a dipsy line, an adze. Corn I can't get. But there's plenty of rum to be had. Let's see; a barrel will be thirty-two and a half quarts at forty dollars. About five thousand."

"Here it is," the girl said.

"And we've got to keep a few thousand for chandler's stuff, and if we're lucky I'll find a chandler that ain't just dealin' in pickaxes and pans and gold borers like every one I've met so far deals in."

He went on reading the list. "Log lines, cod lines, a pump-hook, a draw bucket, three pounds powder, three skeins marling, eight spare blocks, a cat-block, twenty fathoms spare rigging, a sounding-lead, one bung-borer, a dozen sail needles. A lot of this stuff can't be had for love or money."

"How about the long boats?"

"I made a dicker for two at a thousand apiece."

The girl made a hasty appraisal of the octagonal slugs and gold dust she had left. "I'll have to go ashore one more night," was her verdict.

"Better not," the old harpooner advised. "The skipper ain't sleepin' so heavy—"

"It doesn't sound that way," Priscilla said. She had to raise her voice because of the snoring that came from forward of that steerage bulkhead.

"Still and all he'll find out one way or another. How are we going to explain to him that I could pay for all this stuff? He'll know soon enough that you can't pick it up for nothing in this town."

"Tell him you sold the oil," Priscilla said readily.

"You mean tell him a lie?"

She thought a moment, her forehead clouding. Then:

"Some lies aren't sinful—despite my father's teachings."

"But who's going to take his thrashing when he finds out we've tricked him? I am."

"No. I, myself, will take his thrashing," the girl said.

Joshua laughed. The girl could do anything, even tell lies, and old Bartlett would condone it.

"Once more ashore, but only once," he finally consented.

He did not exactly have to consent. She was going anyway. During the last two or three nights at the Gold Rocker she had watched the gamblers, and wondered what had happened to the renegade who had saved her father and dropped out of her life.

Each night she watched more and more anxiously. She had a premonition that if she stayed long enough Dorsey would turn up. The news of a woman from one of the ships singing hymns would certainly reach his ears sooner or later.

"Just once more," she said, "then to-morrow you can make the rest of your purchases, and bring your new crew aboard. As soon as father is strong enough, we'll set sail."

Thus it was for the seventh night that Priscilla Bartlett, leaving the old harpooner on board to watch over her sleeping father, ran down the Jacob's ladder, took the steering oar, and sculled ashore.

"If I can see him just once, and bid him good-by—" that was the prayer on her lips as she crossed the water.

CHAPTER XX.

AN EXCITED HUSH.

IN San Francisco there existed that magic state of affairs which is described by miners in the single word "bonanza."

It was a bonanza time for every one; for the miners who had come down from Poker Flats and Hangtown and Gospel Swamps; for the gamblers who preyed upon the newly-rich, for cantina girls, for barkeeps, for ship chandlers, for sutlers, for owners of horses and wagons and mules and burros, for the ranchers who came from the south with their grain and fruit, for the owners of river-craft, for the keepers of rooming houses; to all these mortals on this barbaric shore bonanza had come, and fortune poured out the contents of her cornucopia into their laps.

I wish, for example, to take the instance of one man:

He was a tall fellow with a handsome Mephistophelean face, black hair, and the eyes of a hawk.

Walking always with something of an air, he came out of that old City

Hotel on the corner of Kearny and Clay Streets which had been built two years before the Sutter's Mill discovery.

Jim Dorsey—for this was the hawk-eyed gentleman himself—stepped into the Pioneer Book Store, which was a part of the old City Hotel—and purchased a copy of a very peculiar book.

I ought rather to say that it was a very peculiar purchase—for him. There were certain words that had been running in his ears, words that had a distinctly personal significance, as for instance the phrases of a memorized love letter.

But since he had first heard those words the eventualities of life and destiny and fortune had come so fast and furiously, that the exact memorization was impaired. And it worried him.

It was paramount that he straighten this matter out before it became an actual obsession. He wanted to get the words and context exactly as they had come from the gentle lips of the angel of the Cape Cod.

He started in at the first page with an innocent assurance that he would light on these strange, haunting sentences. It was a second-hand book, dog-eared, stained, and torn from its voyage across the prairies. Furthermore, it had been copiously underlined. Thus the marked lines caught his eye.

He started at the words: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."

Although this was not exactly what he was looking for, it had the flavor he wanted. Evidently it was a book written for mariners. "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

This sounded very much like old Skipper Bartlett's lingo, and a slight thrill went through the gaunt form of the gambler, as the thrill that will come when you recall vividly some very pleasant experience in life.

He had had a marvelous time on that whaler—from the moment he had cast dice on the deck, when he was brought as a stowaway to the skipper's cabin, until the moment he had bade the white-maned old harpooner good-by.

The intervening events, the eating of food like manna from the hand of the angelic Priscilla, and the firing of that old horse pistol at the mutineers, all these events had grown more and more alluring during his week of hectic gambling on shore.

He thumbed through the pages of this Book he had purchased, still searching for the haunting words. "And they took all the spoil and all the prey, both of men and of beasts." No, he was on the wrong tack. He must search further. "And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight."

This was getting too personal. The girl had spoken of green pastures. It was about that that he wanted to read, so that he could imagine her voice teaching him.

It was a melody that haunted his ears like the incomplete memory of a tune. It tortured him. He began to think it would be hard to find a few words in so thick a book. It was hunting a needle in a haystack.

But he read once more: "Take me up and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you."

Every word he read seemed, perhaps because of his own mental attitude, to breathe of the Cape Cod. He was fairly of a mind to take a trip out on the bay and go aboard. But he thought better of it. He knew very well what sort of a reception the skipper would give him.

The skipper would thank him for helping him in that mutiny; but on the other hand, he would reach for a belaying pin to settle that point about his daughter's insensate fascination for this heathen.

Needless to say, he could not find the words she had taught him. They were unquestionably marked in this very Book, but Dorsey gave up the search as a hopeless task. Besides he was late for his appointment at a gaming house where he was to meet a New England deacon, who like every one else from the Alcalde down to the toughest "Hound," had got the gaming fever.

Up until this night Dorsey had been blessed with a run of luck at another house, the elite Parker House; but the miner stipulated that he wanted to go to the Gold Rocker in order to hear the song bird that San Francisco was going wild about.

Caring much less for women or song than for cards and strong drink, Jim Dorsey had paid little attention to the stories that were going about. He knew there was a woman from the fleet on the bay who was entertaining at one of the frontier barrooms.

But there was nothing so extraordinary about her having come from a ship. Half the population had come from ships, and the other half from across the prairies.

He had no reason in the world to think that this was the angel of the Cape Cod. In fact, if any man had suggested such a lunacy, Dorsey would have called him a silly ass.

He went now, for the first night, to the Gold Rocker House.

At the entrance there was a chow stand, kept by a Chinaman. A black kettle of soup was simmering over a coal fire. A sign read:

Hash, low grade, \$1.75. Eggs, not guaranteed, \$1.00.

On the counter was a small pair of scales.

The Englishman ate his usual evening meal, washed down with rum, then poured some of the dust out of his whisky bottle, and the Chinaman measured it out. He then went to the gaming tables.

Bearded miners were playing at

three card monte and faro. A Swiss sailor, a Chileño, and two Mexicans were at poker; a group of Russians, Japanese, and Kanakas were playing the thimble and strap game, which consisted in doubling a strap of rawhide and rolling it in a round form.

The croupier, a professional from New York, bet six ounces of gold that no man could place a stick of redwood in the loop in the center of the strap without its being caught as the strap was unrolled.

Dorsey watched a miner put down his six ounces and promptly lost the hundred dollars.

"My word!" Dorsey exclaimed.

Two members of that most ancient and most gambling-loving nation in the world—I mean China—stepped up and lost two hundred more.

"My word!"

The croupier glanced up at the Englishman. "You want to try your luck, there, Mr. Limejuicer?"

"Yes, at an honest game of poker, sir."

The croupier measured the Englishman's height. He likewise recognized in his placid mask that Dorsey might possibly be a member of his own ancient and dishonorable profession. He refrained from a second retort.

Dorsey stepped to the poker table.

The deacon from New England was already seated in company with a rat-faced gentleman who, like Dorsey, wore a black frock coat and a beaver hat tipped back over his long curls.

The deacon was dressed in miner's garb. He was a dyspeptic-looking gentleman with sideburns and a satisfied grin.

"No need of tellin' you my name," he said. "I don't ordinarily indulge in this. My family, you see. One of the old families of Plymouth. But they won't know. No need of telling you my name. Don't mention you played with a Plymouth deacon. You understand. The disgrace.

"I'm a rich man, but I haven't lost

my head like the parson at Poker Flats. Still a gentleman born—and a pillar of the church—when I get back!" He smiled with much self-satisfaction. "When I get back! H'm. I'll be a pillar of the community. I'll own that town, by Heaven!"

"My name's Peters," the rat-eyed man said, measuring Dorsey rather critically. "My business is assayin'."

"My name's Dorsey," said the Englishman.

The deacon likewise was satisfied. "You're in for a good game, sir," he said. "Lots to this game, I've found out. A matter of psychology. I'm good at that. I can judge men's faces. Can spot a man cheating on the other side of the room. I've got a nose for it.

"Was on the prison board at home. Always put me where I could pounce on a sinner. A gift. Appointed by God to punish sinners, as you might say. They're afraid of me back there.

"Wait till they see me next time. The seafaring part of the town, you know; awful drunkards. With my money I'll harry them out of the country!"

"That reminds me I want some rum," Dorsey said. He ordered a bottle and parted with forty dollars' worth of his dust.

The rat-eyed man eyed his bag hungrily, and then began dividing the chips. He turned to the barkeep: "Measure this gent's gold out, Tim." He explained to Dorsey: "Chips are an ounce of dust each, sir."

"Quite all right."

The deacon's eyes began to glow. It was going to be a high game.

At the next table, a drunk gambler, modulating his voice to the general quiet of the room, offered to stake his weight in gold on the turn of a card.

Steve Lukon, the proprietor, heard of this nonsense and came up to the table.

"How much do you weigh?" he asked.

"A hundred and fifty pounds."

"I'm on."

A croupier turned the card. The drunk gambler lost. Dorsey computed the licking: A hundred and fifty pounds multiplied to ounces, at fifty dollars for three ounces. The amount staggered him. He had played at Monte Carlo—but forty thousand dollars on the turn of a card beat anything in his gambling career.

"Cards, gents."

"Two," said the deacon hungrily.

"I stand," said Dorsey.

"Dealer takes two," said the rat-faced gentleman.

"From the next table came the piping voice of the drunk gambler. "My weight in gold."

"Weigh his money, Pete," the proprietor said.

"He's only got five thousand left, Steve."

"Then throw him out. He'll fight soon."

Dorsey set to work at his own game. He realized that every man was for himself. Most of them would be trimmed. A few who were experts, or perhaps even cheats, would come out ahead.

Dorsey had already made up his mind to give the deacon a good trimming. He didn't want the gentleman to go back to Plymouth with a fortune, and "harry those hard-drinking seafarers out of the country." It was a matter of tender sentiment with Dorsey. He was saving the seafarers of New England.

Strange to say, the deacon, in the ordinary course of events, was already getting badly trimmed by the rat-faced man. The latter won consistently. Probably a sharp. Not probably, but absolutely. Dorsey had "a nose for these sinners," as the deacon had bragged in reference to himself.

The game did not last long. A cheat trimming a New England reformer; and Dorsey waiting to trim both the cheat and the cheated.

Repeatedly the sharp won out over the deacon with three of a kind against the latter's two pair. Or with four threys against four deuces. This happened even when the deacon himself dealt. The only answer was that the sharp was using a marked deck with packs similar to those of the deck brought from the house. If this was not the case, it meant the sharp had a confederate.

Dorsey called for a new deck, mentioning the fact that the queen of clubs had a torn ear.

The sharp was satisfied. Evidently he had a confederate.

But there was no confederate behind the deacon. That is to say, none directly behind. Dorsey estimated, however, that there was a slight chance that a man at the bar, with his back to the players, could read the deacon's hand in the mirror.

This being the case, Dorsey resolved to go on playing a straight game, taking chances when he wished. The sharp, respecting his caliber, was leaving him alone.

The Englishman started bulling his own luck. The stakes grew higher. They borrowed the barkeep's scales and started weighing out their bets in pounds of dust. The deacon, getting more and more frantic, wanted to bet high and win back his losses.

In front of the sharp the dust and nuggets grew to a good-sized heap. The chips likewise collected at his corner, and, being the banker, he withdrew them from circulation. From then on they would make bets of a hundred dollars.

There came a Jackpot. And all three men had their respective fortunes piled on the table ready for just such a crisis. Three fortunes in rawhide bags of dust, piles of pepitas, chunks, and nuggets. Even so, no one paid any attention.

Men went on with their other games. Further down the fifty-yard stretch of redwood bar the barkeep was serving

Chileños and Kanakas. No man was watching through the mirror.

This nettled Dorsey, for he held four kings, and the fact that both the deacon and the sharp stayed in looked suspicious. The deck must have been cold. He folded up his hand and held it in his palm, backs up.

On the top card, which he knew to be the king of diamonds, there was no wrinkle where Dorsey had seen one before. He had noticed that slight wrinkle—purely an accidental mark that could have no possible meaning. But now it was gone. In other words, the deck had been changed.

It had been changed possibly when the dealer—who during this hand was the sharp—had delved into his carpet bag for more gold.

It was the first time that the sharp had tried to suck Dorsey into the racket.

He stayed in. He opened the betting with a pinch of dust, and then pretended to be bluffed out at the deacon's first big raise. The sharp thus had no inkling of the fact that Dorsey suspected the deck. He merely concluded that the Englishman had no gambling nerve.

The deacon went wild, holding a straight flush. He raised and raised in geometrical progression, pouring his pepitas and dust into the scales with a violently trembling hand. The sharp sweetened it slightly each time, bleeding the victim to the very last nugget.

"There you are!" the latter cried in a shaking voice. He showed his five clubs, a straight up to the Jack.

"I'll be blowed!" the sharp exclaimed. "Just beat you by a hair." He put down a straight in hearts up to the queen. "Never saw anything like that in my life."

The deacon went white. He slumped back in his chair, his glassy eyes watching the nimble fingers of the cheat scooping in his entire fortune.

"Better take a drink," Dorsey said. Indeed the man looked as if he were

going to die right there. "It's between you and me, sir?" he said jovially to the cheat. "Quite a fortune. Hope I can match it if this occurs again."

The sharp reflected that Dorsey had been pretty easily frozen out—even with four of a kind. He was not much of a gambler after all.

"Sure. It's between you and me."

They disregarded the shorn lamb. The latter, too dazed to get up, sat staring at the piles of gold, at the scrawny fingers of the sharp, and then up to his rat's eyes. The rat's eyes did not meet his. If they had, they would have seen murder slowly kindling in the deacon's hollow sockets.

Dorsey was dealing, parting the deck and bringing it together in a whir, then in a cascade of falling cards. It was the cold deck—handed to him by the sharp. All right. If it was not an honest deck, Dorsey would treat it accordingly.

He knew all the tricks ever invented in dealing, even though he never cheated in his life. But this was a peculiar case. He held out an ace of spades, then thrust the deck to his opponent for cutting.

They played a few hands, first one man winning a pinch of dust, then the other. A hand or two trusting to the dictates of fortune. But each time Dorsey dealt, he held out another spade.

The cold deck came, the sharp dealing Dorsey four queens. They went at it quietly, raising each other back and forth. The sharp gave no evidence of stopping, neither did Dorsey.

The glassy-eyed deacon, still contemplating murder, saw his own fortune being thrust back on the table. And the fortune of the sharp doubled it. And the fortune of the Englishman matched the whole pile.

"If you win this time, I'll kill you," the deacon was muttering. "So help me God, I'll kill you if you win this—a queen over a jack—eh? If this turns

out like that you're a cheat. I'll blow out your brains."

The sharp looked up smiling. Over the rim of the table there peeped the muzzle of his gun.

"Hey, Tim," he called out to the barkeep. Then softly so none of the surrounding tables could hear, he said: "Watch this sucker. I just trimmed him in an honest game, and he wants to kill me."

He turned quietly to Dorsey. "You satisfied, mister?"

"Quite."

"This is an honest game, ain't it?"

"Quite."

"All my pay-dirt's on the table. Otherwise I'd raise again. Got a hunch luck's with me. I'm calling a show-down."

He knew that he'd dealt Dorsey four queens, so he did not wait to see them. He threw his hand on the table. It was four aces.

"Quite extraordinary!" Dorsey exclaimed. "Just beat you by a hair! Jove. Never saw anything like it!" He put his royal flush on the table.

The deacon was confused. Evidently the man who had trimmed him was not a sharp after all. For he had lost his entire fortune—two fortunes. The deacon looked from one to another, in blank consternation. No use murdering the little rat-eyed man. And to murder the tall Englishman looked like a far too ticklish proposition.

Besides he noticed that for some reason or other the Englishman likewise had a gun muzzle peeping over the table top, the gun-metal winking merrily at the rat's eyes.

Consternation was on the rat's face. His jaw had dropped, his tongue seemed swollen and protruding. He looked as if he were about to choke.

And consternation was on the face of the barkeep. What sort of game was this anyway? Who was going to be killed? And who was going to do the killing? And how did it happen that there were five aces in a deck—

four in one hand, and the fifth in a royal flush? And strangest of all, no one seemed to object to this miracle.

The fact is, the deacon did not look at the hands at all. He was too concerned with the passion of murder.

The rat-eyed man was watching Dorsey take in the nuggets. He said nothing. He dared not. There was that gun. And for the first time that night, the card-sharp realized that he had been playing with a very dangerous-looking hombra.

Four men with guns drawn. Men around at other tables totally oblivious to the imminent disaster. Then abruptly there came a roar of voices from the dance hall.

A loud yipping, a clapping of hands, a pounding of jackboots on the bare pine boards of the floor, broke into that moment of tense quiet. It broke a spell. Or rather a new and more potent spell was woven over that house.

Dorsey and the deacon, and the rat-eyed man turned to look toward the door of the dance hall.

Gradually the applause thinned, from various parts of the house, scattered voices called out for silence. The cries from many excited throats seemed to soften, to be gathered in a more concerted hum, like many coarse fibers gathered and twisted and spun out to a single strand, then thinned to a fine filament of silk.

This filament that remained of the voice of the pack was the song sung by Priscilla.

CHAPTER XXI.

SEEING RED.

DORSEY'S shoulders stiffened, his neck was taut as he bent his head forward. His black, hawklike eyes stared; the jaw dropped.

He saw her through the door of the gaming room, over the shoulders of the miners. He saw a radiant flame through the smoke-befogged room—a

flame in the form of a human being, delineated in the image of God.

The flame burned into his brain. He saw red. He was gripped with an inexplicable anger, a fury, as if some one had taken from him the dearest possession in his life. What she was singing he did not know. It made no difference.

He only knew that the girl who had taught him that "goodness and mercy would follow him all the days of his life," was up there in front of these gamblers and thieves and drunkards, singing a beautiful song. A pearl had been cast before swine.

This renegade gambler was a peculiar fellow. Like many men who consorted with the flotsam of gambling dives, he had an unreasonable conviction that human beings were either very good or very bad. This theory applied more especially to women.

There were cantina girls, who belonged in gambling dives, and there were angels who did not belong there. If angels were found there, it meant that the forces of hell were working overtime.

It meant that a smirch was made across the battlements of Heaven. It meant that something holy was being debased. It meant that God was being dealt a cold deck.

Before Priscilla had sung the first verse of her hymn she saw a tall figure, elbowing his way in powerful shoves through the gang of miners below her.

He was head and shoulders above most of the crowd. And she could not have helped seeing him—even if, as the case was, she had not been looking for him.

Abruptly the silken thread of her song was cut. She stood with flushed face, parted lips, eager burning eyes looking down to him.

A dead silence gripped the packed dance hall of the Gold Rocker House.

These men who were rudely elbowed out of the way growled sullenly but softly. They saw that the personal

affront had come from a powerful-looking stranger, one on whose Mephistophelean face there was the foreshadowing of murder.

Dorsey got to the row of bottles and lighted candles. Without so much as putting his hand on the edge of the stage, he bounded up.

Then precipitously a hullabaloo of voices stormed upon him. He had seen a temple idol of his own violated, but he overlooked the fact that he was violating an idol of five hundred hot-blooded men.

No one could make out the words of that shout, for they were stripped from many different vocabularies. "Raus! Vamose! Kill!" were the most outstanding cries. But whatever the nationality of this crazy stranger, the crowd saw that he did not understand the purport of their yells.

They saw, likewise, that the idol herself did not understand. And that was the most flabbergasting part of the scene. Instead of backing away or calling upon her audience for help, the songstress actually put out her arms, and threw them about the neck of this intruder.

"Out with him! Lynch him! Murder him!" But the cries petered out. Evidently they were looking upon an entirely different scene than they had anticipated.

Probably the song bird had found her lover after traveling to this barbaric shore from the edge of the earth. The years and the seas might have separated them. At least that was what the audience at the Gold Rocker thought when they saw the girl's eyes, beaming like stars.

Providentially they did not hear what he was saying to her. He spoke softly, but in a savage whisper.

"Look here, you! What in the name of ten thousand devils are you doing in this pub?" He was holding her hands in a viselike grip. Her seraphic face, turned up toward him, had lost its calm serenity. Excite-

ment, joy, bewilderment, apprehension, adoration swept across it like a succession of stormy clouds over placid water.

"You know what I'm saying to you—a child like you entertaining these gin-guzzling rozzers!"

The flush left her cheeks, giving way to a sudden pallor. Her eyes widened.

"Who let you run off? Where's your father?"

"On board."

"And he let you run away. Jove, it's outrageous. You shan't stay here. I'll take you to my lodgings at the City Hotel."

"No, no, I can't go there—"

"Very well, to your ship then?"

The men in the forefront of the audience saw the change that came over the girl's face. Evidently the intruder was not so welcome as at first it had seemed. Here was some tipsy Sydney Duck trying to break up a show.

The audience was nonplused. Was it a meeting of long lost lovers? Or was it some one arising from the girl's past to confront her in the hour of her great triumph?

One man seemed to come to a decision while the others were still dumfounded. It was Steve Lukon, the proprietor.

He stepped from one of the booths to the stage and shoved his massive shoulder against the shoulder of the unwelcome guest.

"I'd admire to sit in on this game, stranger," he said quietly.

Dorsey did not turn toward him. He did not hear him, even though the words were spoken in his very ear.

"I'm seeing you back to your ship, my child," he announced to Priscilla.

"Yes, yes—I'll go!"

"I said I'm sittin' in on the game, stranger."

Dorsey felt a hand on his arm. The arm that was reached out with iron muscles taut, clinging to the girl's hands.

"I'll go back—" the girl stammered.

"Not until you finish out the evening's service," Steve Lukon said.

The Englishman whirled about.

"Look here, I say! Who the devil are you?"

"Lukon. I own this joint."

Dorsey's fury at the scene of this girl entertaining a house of sousing hellions was concerted now, focusing itself upon this one man. The owner of the joint? Well, then, that meant he was responsible for the girl's appearance.

Still holding the girl with his right hand, he shot a left uppercut at the square jaw of the proprietor. Steve Lukon reeled back, knocking over candles and bottles, and hurtling into the mass of spectators on the dance floor.

He did not reach the floor. The men down there were so jammed that he was held bodily in the air, and then shoved back to the stage. It was precisely like a boxer who had tripped backward into the ropes and then been pushed into the ring again.

The big smoke-befogged room seemed like a maelstrom of lights, of bearded faces whirling about. Steve Lukon. A bedlam of shouts deafened him. His head was swimming. His insensate fury burst as he saw Dorsey and the girl flee to the door at the back of the stage.

Reeling like a drunkard on the empty stage, Lukon drew his pistol. He lurched forward toward the door.

There was an exchange of shots. Lukon had fired point-blank into the darkness of the hallway into which Dorsey and the girl had disappeared. A flash of light answered his shot, and he fell.

Out in the mud and slush of the lot behind the big shack Dorsey found himself plowing along, tripping over tent ropes, sheering up sharp against an outhouse.

"Had to do it. Dare say I finished him. The bally old rozzar was going

to shoot us both. Had to do it, you know—look here, who are you?"

Evidently the girl knew the way out of that corral. She had slipped from his grasp as they fled from the cantina. He sped after her as far as a street. When I say street I mean a stretch of knee-deep mud paved, as all San Francisco streets were paved, with tobacco boxes, barrels of spoiled provisions, bags of coffee, and limbs of trees.

He shot frantic glances into every corner of the corrals, past sheds, over fences, and darkened tents. But the girl had vanished like an ethereal spirit.

A little while later, finding his way to the water front, whither he was certain the girl had fled, he saw a whale-boat, moving out into the moonlit water, sculled along by a slim ghost-like figure. It was like Charon crossing the Styx into the land of the dead.

Dorsey did not attempt to follow her to the ship. On board she was, as far as he could surmise, perfectly safe. The wisest move for him to make was to keep under cover. If he were found he would have to give an account of the shooting of Steve Lukon. The gaming house proprietor might have been killed. And lynching without trial seemed to be quite fashionable in this barbarous city.

Dorsey went back to his hotel, keeping at all times out of the moonlight. If he had known what was taking place at that hour on board the Cape Cod he would have taken a different course of action.

The simile of Charon sculling a boat to the regions of the dead happened to be a very appropriate one.

CHAPTER XXII.

ABOARD THE WHALER.

ANOTHER boat had come alongside the Cape Cod shortly before Priscilla put off from shore.

Four men, skulking shadows, stood down across the bay from the east-

ward, approaching the old bark with muffled oars. They came only as whalemén approaching a whale can come—without a squeak of oar-locks, without a swish of a blade in the water. The Cape Cod loomed up, like a giant fin-back, casting her shadow upon the long boat and the four robbers.

On board ship were two old men—Joshua and the skipper—neither of whom had the slightest inkling of the coming disaster. As yet Joshua was not watching for the return of Priscilla as he had watched on the first night. He did not expect her for two hours or so. He was below carving an effigy of the skipper's bobtail cat.

Joshua could scarcely have heard the approach of the four murderers anyway, even if their oars had not been muffled, for the air vibrated with the skipper's snores.

The doughboy was sent aboard first, enacting his customary rôle of cat's-paw for the cautious Swope.

He reported that the decks were clear, that loud snores in the captain's cabin indicated that Bartlett was asleep. Whether Joshua or the girl were on board he could not say. There was a light in the steerage, another in the galley. Aside from this and the anchor lights above the ship was dark.

Swope, the cooperer, and the negro moored their boat at the vessel's prow, then climbed the backropes and bobstays to the forecastle deck. They had not ventured to board her by the stern, because of the light in the steerage.

Leaving the doughboy on deck to stand watch, the three men went below. Tiptoeing in canvas shoes, without being heard, it was an easy matter to work their way aft. The skipper's snores screened any sound the negro might have made. The cooperer, always apprehensive, made no sound.

And Swope walked, according to his inveterate custom, like a cat stalking a mouse. He peered into the forecastle, into the lighted galley, into every part of the vessel as he led the way aft.

On approaching the steerage, the lanky cooperer, terrified to the point of murdering any one in his path, drew his gun.

Swope saw the scrawny hand—a writhing mass of tendons and flushed skin—thrust itself into the beam of light that came from the steerage door. On the instant the mate's hand gripped it.

Swope and Brass had both caught sight of the silvery mane of hair bending over the work of carving a piece of whalebone. The harpooner was a big man, a veritable giant, and Brass could see no safe way to deal with him, except by murder.

Swope waited for the clumsy negro to catch up with them. Then, in a soft voice, he said:

"Stand up, Joshua. Drop your knife. Put up your hands."

The old harpooner looked up with a gasp. He saw the thin, jaundiced face of the mate, the staring frightened eyes of Tom Brass, and the pudgy lips, the ebony mask of Slushy the cook.

"Don't cry out," Swope was saying in a modulated voice. "Brass, keep your gun bearin' on him. But don't fire unless he cries out. I want no gun shootin'. Not yet. Might be heard across the water."

Joshua lumbered to his feet, his mass of white hair brushing the beams of the deck above. His head, as he stared at the three men, began to nod as if in palsy. Either palsy or a complete acquiescence, as though he said: "All right. Whatever you command is done. I am alone except for the skipper. You have us at your mercy." That was the way he nodded his head.

"Now then, Slushy, you and me for the skipper's cabin." SnORES, somewhat irregular now, still came from that direction. "Brass, keep this man quiet, till we come back."

The rest was easy.

Skipper Bartlett started out of his sleep, when Swope spoke. Swope did not have to speak loudly. He did not

have to shake him. The master must have responded subconsciously while in fathoms of slumber to the voice of his mate.

The old seadog awoke, blinked his eyes at the light which the negro had lit, then threw off his blankets and sat up gaping.

Bartlett, in recovering from his wound, had spent most of the week in sleeping. It was the deep sleep of a convalescent. The only dreams that had troubled him were the dreams of whales getting off to the horizon before he could hoist, swing, and lower away.

The gam of whales off short between the Gate and Point Reyes had become an obsession with him. It was of far greater importance than that footling little scrap with his fore-castle rats.

They had made off with his boats and provisions—a matter of a few thousand dollars lost. But the whales might mean a loss of a few hundred thousand.

When he awoke, his mind started revolving slowly about the same old fixed idea:

"You there, mate? What's up? Are they blowin'? Where away? Man the main braces! Lay me on 'em—"

He paused, stammering in his daze. Then:

"The devil shiver my timbers, it's you!"

He squinted, focusing his eyes upon the two buck teeth, the tightened grinning lips, the yellow skin. "You mangy whelp! Where's my crew—my boats? I'll have you hanged—"

"Put the cuffs on him, Slushy," Swope was laughing. "Put 'em round that there wrist—'God is Love!' Put it there."

"Priscilla!" the flabbergasted old skipper cried out in terror. "Priscilla!" He had attempted to spring out of his bunk, but the big negro was in front of him. The skipper sat there

looking up into the coal black countenance, the flash of great pearly teeth.

Bartlett was wide awake, but unmindful of the manacles on his hands. His one thought now, greater than the obsession about his whales, was the safety of his girl.

"Priscilla!" he called again, tearing his throat in that one desperate scream.

Swope put his fingers in his big ears. "Cork up, old duffer! The skit ain't on board. You know that. Think it's mornin'? No, it ain't even midnight by a long way. She's on shore singing hymns. Now, then, stop yowling and come aft."

Old Joshua, with hands held up so that they touched the beams of the deck above, was standing in front of the crouching Tom Brass. The latter breathed a sigh of relief when Swope and the cook came into the room with their prisoner.

Bartlett's keen gray eyes met the bleary eyes of his faithful harpooner.

"Priscilla!" Bartlett gasped in misery.

He was astonished to see his old Joshua smile. "It's all right, skipper."

"What in God's name—" Bartlett began.

"She's ashore," Joshua announced in grim, calm triumph.

"Ashore!" the old father choked. Then he murmured, a radiant light coming to his wrinkled old visage, "Praise the all-merciful God!"

Swope stepped between the two old men. "There's no use keepin' this dodderin' idiot," he said, looking at Joshua. "We've got no use for him."

"You mean you're goin' to let him go?" Brass exclaimed. "Don't do that, Mr. Mate! He'll go ashore and get the whole town after us. Kill him—that's the best to do with him. He's a powerful dangerous old dog, mate! Leave me go aboard him with this gun. It's the only safe way—"

"No shootin'," Swope warned again. "What we're going to do, we do quiet-like. Bind him and gag him."

"Another prisoner!" the big negro grumbled. "What-all's the use of that, Mistah Mate? I'll go aboard him quiet with this heah knife of mine. In the guts. That 'll be quiet."

"Stow him below in a cask." This was Mr. Swope's judgment. "And head the cask down. Later we can heave him by the board—after he's smothered. They find his carcass—no signs of violence. It 'll be as if he drowned."

This system pleased both the negro and the cooperer. Together they took the old giant forward to the hatch.

Mr. Swope turned to the skipper.

"Now then, Bartlett, my business with you won't take long. Where's the gold?"

Bartlett, standing with legs apart as if on a rough sea, hands crossed before him in irons, grizzled head bent forward, stared at the grinning yellow face.

"Where's the what?" he asked.

"You heard me."

"What gold?"

"The dust and nuggets and pay your daughter has been filchin' out of the drunk miners ashore."

"What lies are you spewin' out of your foul teeth?" the skipper roared. "You yellow-faced whelp! Strike me dead, shoot me down, but I'll kill you first—"

He made a lunge at the mate, who leaped agilely out of his reach. The old captain, stumbling over a chair, and losing his balance because of his manacled hands, fell forward to the deck.

Swope stood up above the exhausted, panting form. Swope was laughing softly. He had the whole situation well in hand. The girl ashore; the old harpooner in the hold, the decks clear; the old skipper throwing a fit down there at his very feet; that was a very comfortable state of affairs.

Swope sat down. Still chuckling, he took out his pipe, filled it, tipped it toward the oil lamp chimney. The yellow beams lit the blue dragon of his

hand, and shone upward into his lean face, etching every wrinkle.

The old man on the deck was puffing heavily, regaining his breath, lumbering up to his knees. For a moment he stayed there on his creaky knees, looking up at the illumined face, which was like a detached yellow skull hanging from the deck beams above.

Two slender wreaths of smoke issued from Swope's pinched nostrils. "I reckon you aim to tell me when you get ready," he laughed. "Well, you're ready now. No more callin' names. No more throwin' fits. Won't do you any good. It might rile me. I'm calm and quiet now, old Bible-thumper. But I may change."

The aged Bartlett struggled to his feet. He had to grasp a stanchion to help himself, and then he clung to it, like a drunkard to a lamp post. In what hideous corner of hell had he awakened? Before what infernal judgment seat was he standing? What fiend from the nether depths sitting there with smoking nostrils was going to pronounce sentence-upon his lost soul?

"The gold is on this ship. She brought it aboard every night. That much we know," Swope said. "Maybe you'll just as lief we search the tub from stem to stern? There's four of us, but it 'll take a long time. Meanwhile you'll be writhin'."

"Writhin'?" the dazed old man repeated.

"For puttin' us to that much trouble, it's only fair we put you to some trouble. There's some wood coals in the galley."

Still the old skipper did not answer.

The mate's brows furrowed, and his lids lowered over the fishy eyes, leaving two thin sickly slits of light.

What was the matter with the old skipper anyway? Couldn't he see that he was done for if he tried to cross his captors? Why did he not answer? Was the sum so great that he was go-

ing to fight for it to the last ditch—even to the point of torture?

But Swope did not excite himself. He did not attempt to get the secret out of his prisoner by storming about and bullyragging and working himself into a frenzy. He preserved a venomous equanimity.

The sea-cook and the lanky Tom Brass were returning from the hatchway.

"I'll ask you once more—the last time: Where'd you stow that gold?"

The old skipper shook his head dumbly. He was distracted, frantically trying to fathom what this talk of gold was all about. Was there by some grim grip of destiny a gold hoard on his stricken ship after all? If not, why had Swope come back?

What had Swope heard during that week? He must have heard that there was something very enticing on board the old whale ship—something more enticing than the gold fields beyond Sacramento.

Had old Joshua and his daughter been holding back something? His mind, groping in this fog, kept stumbling on that baffling revelation of old Joshua: his daughter was ashore!

"You won't answer?" Swope was saying calmly. "All right, Slushy, you go for'd to your galley and get a scuttle of live coals. We'll make this tidewater crimp tell what he knows. It won't take long."

The giant negro pranced off, with a graceful gesture of his baboon arms, his head lolling rhythmically to his shuffling step. The skipper heard him snapping his fingers as he disappeared in the darkness, the sound syncopating with his shuffling feet. The African was actually cake-walking!

For an eternity, Skipper Bartlett looked helplessly, like one stricken in his mind, at the smoke oozing from Swope's pinched nostrils and buck teeth. Torture was coming—unless he gave up some secret about gold—gold that he did not know existed!

Swope smoked contemplatively, one ear cocked for the return of those prancing feet.

He heard something. The African cake-walker, he reflected, must have changed his step. The approaching footsteps lacked that shuffling syncopation which tickles the marrow of your bones. They came hurriedly, with a thump, a trip, a pattering. Had the negro got a barrel of coals that he came so awkwardly?

Brass was listening with red, terrified eyes. Swope was overconfident, but the cooperer was sensitive to every nuance of sound. They were playing a game which might land them all on the gallows; that had been his attitude from the first. And now he realized that the footsteps coming aft were not the black's!

Swope caught the difference a moment later. He jumped to his feet, holding that infernal smoke in between half-parted lips.

As the two men dashed to the steerage door, they were met by a peculiarly disconcerting apparition.

A slim, beautiful woman was there, clothed brilliantly like a flame in a dress of silk that was trimmed with stripes of plaid and flowers. Paint was upon her lips and upon her cheeks. A fire that was dazzling burned in her big eyes.

Behind her was the pimply-faced doughboy. It was his feet that had thumped along, stumbling in his excitement as he shoved the girl before him on the way to the steerage.

From Swope's open mouth came a gasp of smoke. Tom Brass's ungainly arm fell inertly to his side, the hand that held the pistol shaking like a leaf.

The skipper held out his manacled wrists.

"Priscilla!" he moaned. In that single word there was all the hopelessness, the tragedy of a father who knew that everything he possessed was to be destroyed.

How inconsequential was the jeop-

ardy of a moment before, when only his life was in danger. How trifling a matter it seemed to him to be tortured or to lose his life—when compared to this!

CHAPTER XXIII.

FASCINATION.

IT was the first time that Priscilla had come aboard still wearing the costume with which they had bedecked her at the Gold Rocker. In her flight from the dance hall after the scene with Dorsey, she had given no thought as to how she looked.

Hurrying to the waterfront, then sculling her boat toward the whale ship, she recalled the fact that she must not appear before her father in that costume.

The paint must be cleaned from her face. It would have been abhorrent for her even to stand before the pious old Joshua, accoutered as she was to win the hearts of roistering men.

But here she was, in the garb of a cantina girl, standing before her father!

Many emotions might have been stirred up in the hearts of both father and daughter in this dramatic meeting. But there was time only for the one simple act on the part of each:

The girl saw the handcuffs on her father's wrist, and fell down on her knees before him with a heart-breaking cry.

The father inclined his head forward, his eyes closed, his lips pressing upon the golden locks. He pitied her with that divine intensity of a father for a child, which has been likened to the pity of God for those who fear Him.

The doughboy was excitedly stammering out what had happened.

"Saw her alone in the boat—alone. Saw her comin' on alongside. Knew it was her, bareheaded, moonlight on her hair. Knew it well enough. And alone. Alone she was—see?"

"You seem to be tryin' to tell the

complicated fact that the skit was alone," Swope said. "I understand after your explanations. All right. She was alone. But why did you let her come aboard when I told you—"

"Because she—because she was alone."

"You were to warn me if any one approached."

"But I figured she had more gold. Comin' back from the dance hall. Saw her clothes. Knew she was rigged out. Knew where she'd hauled from."

Swope would have had to admit that that was a better way of handling the situation than scaring her off.

"I just laid low. She come alongside at the stern so she didn't see our boat up forward. She thought they was no one on board that shouldn't be. So she runs up—up the Jacob's ladder. I bein' hidin' in the lee of the round-house, see?"

"She runs up. If she'd come a minute before she'd of heard you confabbin' down in the steerage here. But just before she come alongside you men down here stopped talkin'—"

Swope reflected that it was then that he had sent the cook forward for the coals. During the cook's absence they had observed a tense silence. The girl meanwhile had boarded the ship without making a sound.

She had come so quietly that Swope, even though he was in the steerage and directly above her boat, had not heard her.

"When she was aboard, on deck, leapin' over the rail like a boy—why, she saw me. She thought I was Joshua. Called, 'That you, Joshua?' Didn't know it was me." Thought I was some one else. Thought I was Joshua.

"I said, 'Sure, it's Joshua! Come to my arms.' But she ran for'rd, skimmed like a flyin' fish. Ran like a shadow of a sheet flickin' in the wind, ran like hell. But I caught her. Up for'rd there at the fo'c's'le.

"The fore hatchway is where I

caught her. Caught her as she was jumpin'. Jumped in after her. Caught her in my arms. Saw her face in the light of the galley. Thought I had some one else.

"All painted up—see? Look at her face. But I dragged her here. The cook dropped a scuttle of live coals when he saw us. Liked to of set the hulk on fire."

"All right, boy," Swope said, grinning from ear to ear. "You've explained enough why you disobeyed me. And bein' there's extenuatin' circumstances I won't hang you, which is what you deserve.

"Go above again and stand guard. The next time you see a boat approachin' us, call me. There's no one else you need let come aboard." He smiled. "We've got all we need right now. Didn't have till she come aboard. But now that she's here among us, why, the congregation is all set for prayers."

The doughboy regained his breath; the furrows on his cherubic forehead smoothed. A smile came to his lips, a smile that was heavenly, despite the cold blister in the corner. He breathed a tremendous sigh of relief at shuffling that responsibility onto his master's shoulders.

A girl was something that he was not used to handling, especially when the handling had to be rough. Hiram was fairly shaking all over his overgrown, loose-jointed frame when he had brought her in. But he went out, thanking his lucky stars.

Swope and Tom Brass were staring as if entranced at the girl's head bowed before her father's eyes, her ringlets catching the full blaze of the lamp like a heap of gold.

Brass had gripped his master's arm. And when Swope said: "Get up, my lady, I want to look at you," Brass pulled him back.

"Don't touch *her*, Mr. Swope. I'm warnin' you, Mr. Swope. Don't lay a finger on that woman! It 'll mean the death of us."

The psychology of Brass was very much like that of the doughboy. In fact, it was basically the psychology of the whole crew of the Cape Cod. The skipper's daughter was a force that mariners could not cope with. She did not belong on the ship. She had brought ill luck—as most of them firmly believed.

Starvation, freezing, scurvy and a plentiful lack of whales had been their lot. It was capped with mutiny, which is ranked only second to shipwreck as the ultimate curse of a ship.

Brass, who was congenitally a coward, was superstitious. But his superstition in this case was quite sound. The curse of having a woman on board a ship is only a problematical hoodoo. But that a curse follows men who have done violence to a woman—there is nothing problematical about that on sea or land.

Although Swope, properly speaking, was not a part of the crew, and hence was somewhat immune from fore-castle traditions, he was a cautious individual. He knew that he was handling a very delicate situation.

Brass would not stand by and see the girl handled roughly. Brass was too fearful of consequences. The negro was a second problem. He was an untrustworthy factor. If he took it into his head to champion the girl—which he might conceivably do—the lid of hell itself would be off.

Swope reflected on these matters. And when he helped the girl to her feet he was the essence of chivalry.

She turned upon him, her eyes blazing, her face so white that the rouge spots stood out like smears of blood. She stood between Swope and her father like a tigress protecting her young.

The mate had never seen this side of Priscilla Bartlett. He had always regarded her as a little nuisance running about the decks, a child, dressed as the children of that day in quilted petticoat, woolen stockings, sometimes a

black bonnet, sometimes a blue kerchief across her bosom.

But here she was blossomed suddenly into a ravishing woman. No longer a serene young girl, smiling at every one with a childlike smile, singing dulcet songs, darning woolen caps for her crew of worshipping heathens.

Instead she was a woman with vivid scarlet lips, a woman with a deadly challenge in her eyes, a woman whose body was on fire with hate.

For the first time on that voyage the mate of the Cape Cod felt the spell this ethereal being had cast over the fore-castle. For the first time Priscilla's sway extended abaft the mast. It left Swope in a delirium of cross purposes, of feverish thrills, of uncertainties, dreads, yearnings.

Yearnings, I say. 'He had the impulse to take her in his arms and press those vivid lips to his. He could do it. Why not? The skipper was in irons, the girl was weak. The doughboy was on deck, the sea-cook was still scraping up his spilled coals.

But there was the lanky, red-eyed Tom Brass. And there was some sort of taboo, bred in the bones of men since prehistoric ages.

That taboo made Swope yearn all the more. A hoard of gold, a beautiful girl who had captivated a city, a life of luxury on some rancho in Mexico. That was the tangible form assumed by that vague surge that was heating Swope's veins.

Swope, the leading mutineer, in love with his skipper's daughter! That surely would open Pandora's Box and liberate the forces of hell!

Lifting himself as best he could from the maelstrom of wild thoughts, the mate grasped for a plan of action.

There was no time, of course, to make an overture of love. It would have been nonsensical to so much as cast her a smile. It would be like smiling at the teeth of a tigress. But he could pursue the same course on a different tack.

It would have to be a plain matter of abduction.

And before that he would have to get the gold. To be wandering about the coast of California with a captive—and no money—was not an inviting prospect.

The gold hoard, the girl, and a boat to sail away—that was the combination. But the gold must come first.

The pleasant smell of live wood coals was in his nostrils. He turned to see a shadow in the steerage doorway.

The negro had returned from his errand, and was standing there, the skillet of gleaming red coals in his hand, two gleaming red dots which were his eyes, burning in his head, saliva dripping from his expectant and excited lips.

He was looking at the girl.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CATLIKE TACTICS.

SWOPE glanced down at the girl's eyes. She was staring at that skillet of coals like a bird staring at the eyes of a snake.

The mate realized that he was playing this trump card too soon. He must not resort to torture now. He must hold that card back and play it at the right time. Even to threaten it would mean the loss of everything.

He was wise enough to know that a third degree is much slower in its results than a quiet, cajoling attack.

"I'm goin' to free the old man," he said to the girl. "Too bad we haven't a key to them handcuffs. But I sent Slushy for coals. Here, you, Slushy, get a hacksaw, heat the cuffs. Careful not to burn the old gent. Give the cuffs a slice or two, then squeeze 'em with a vise, and they'll snap off nicely."

The girl felt a surge of enormous relief. The maddening tension broken, and the sudden fear at the sight of those coals dispelled, a sudden weakness swept over her whole body. She

sank to her knees. Swope reached for her, lifted her up.

As he carried her out, the sound of her father's voice calling, awakened her from her fainting spell.

But she found herself alone with Swope in the stateroom just forward of the steerage bulkhead. It was her father's cabin.

She was sitting on the bunk, looking up into the lean, yellow face of the mate. The latter was smiling complacently, his two buck teeth showing like the nippers of an old horse.

"There now, feel better?" He reached for the rum. "A drink. Better steady your nerves. You just about fainted when you knew the danger was over."

She shoved away the proffered glass.

"No? Then rest a minute and we'll talk it over."

He lit his pipe again, blowing thin blue smoke through the open space between his teeth.

She began to collect herself. Why had he come back? What did he want of her? What had happened to his gang of mutineers?

How was it that the four worst cut-throats of them all had come back to start hell brewing again on that peaceful and ill-starred ship? She waited, never taking her eyes from his.

"I'm in a peck of trouble," he began in a soft, modulated voice. "Don't look like it? Think I got everything in my hands,—sheet, tiller, and the wind sitting in the sail? Oh, no. I'm on the rocks. Everybody's turned against me: your father, old Joshua, the mutineers, which I've done my best to bring back to this ship."

Priscilla knew perfectly well that he was leading up to something very carefully. And she waited, as if ready to catch him up on the slightest slip. She was like a cat watching.

He had never known those seraphic eyes to look so green, so venomous. They were like green phosphorescence burning in the alabaster face.

"Now these three murderers I brought back with me—should have left them stranded upriver with the rest of the crew who wouldn't come back. Tried my best to get 'em all.

"And this is what I got, the three bloodthirstiest crimps this side of Shanghai. Done my best. You see that. And what do I get for it? I'll get hanged if I stay on board, that's certain. But it was worth it—only if I could square myself with you—"

There was not a tremor on her lips. It was as if she were not listening to this outlandish yarn. It was more as if she were watching him, like a deaf person who tries to read the purport of the words from the movement of the speaker's lips. His voice meant nothing. It was the possibility of movement that she was guarding against.

"Those pirates wanted to kill your father first thing. Can you fathom that? But there's a reason. You want to know it?"

She did not answer.

But he went on: "Gold—that's the reason. They heard somewhere upriver that you've been singing on shore to them roistering, howling miners. They know you've been stowin' away their gifts of nuggets. And they want it!"

He saw a vivid flash in her eyes, and he knew that he had struck a vibrant chord. The fact was, he was playing a skillful tune.

"But they won't get it. Not a nugget. Not a grain of dust! I'll grant you that!"

"So that's what brought you back—"

"Brought *them* back," he corrected.

"To murder us all—" she continued in the same breath.

"Murder you? Who's goin' to murder you? They'll try it, that fore-castle scum. But what do you think I'm here for? Didn't I come back? Ain't I here again to make amends for what's happened?"

He began to wheedle. "Why, look here; you're holdin' that mutiny ag'in' me, I know. Same as your father. But who started it? Down there forward is where it started. And I was drawn into it. *On pain of death I had to go with 'em.* And I knew it was the best way. I'd go with 'em, that's what I decided, and then watch my chance and bring the provisions back."

He caught a flash in her eye. "You don't believe that, eh? Well, if you look at that boat I brought back, you will see the provisions of this old hulk stowed away in her. Cross my heart, b' George! It's all back; I brought it to hand it to you."

He saw that this brought no response, so he hurried on excitedly. "And what happened? They get scared your father will put us all in irons, and they hop onto him. Put the irons on him first. And old Joshua they stow away in the fore hatchway.

"The dirty snivelin' whelps! Right away I sent for coals to bust the handcuffs. No, he's all right. Don't worry. He's all right. I'll save him for you. But first I want to know where I stand. I ain't goin' to play into everybody's hands, free everybody, and then get hanged for a mutineer."

The girl had returned to her sphinx-like calm, looking, waiting, watching.

"Look here, do you believe me?" he whined.

No answer. He whined in a more insistent nasal tone: "Do you think I had anything to do with that mutiny? Me—a ship's officer? Mixin' in with that fore-castle filth? Me—Swope. Likely idea! Damn—I blush to think of it."

He scoffed, tossing his skull-like head, his jaundiced face scowling in disgust at the thought. "They made me get aboard one of them boats at the point of a gun, so help me God! And I went. And then what happened? I came back. That's what."

At this point he was not so sure whether the girl was listening or not.

He saw merely the sphinx. There was no telltale flicker across that pallid countenance. Her face was something carved out of marble.

He was sweating, this fellow Swope. Not blushing exactly, but sweating. He found it embarrassing spinning lies to this girl. It would have been easier to come right out with it, and tell her the truth: that she had cast her spell over him, as over the rest of the ship, and over the city on shore.

But she was half child, half tigress, and that was not an easy kind of being to make love to.

He wiped his forehead. The yellow face darkened. "Well, then, miss," he said, almost whimpering, "call me a liar. Every one else thinks I'm rotten. They none of 'em believe me. Not even your father, who I've followed to the ends of the sea as a friend, a brother.

"Call me a liar. But so help me God, I'll follow this same course. I came here to right myself, but the skipper wouldn't listen. You wouldn't listen. Joshua wouldn't listen. The snivelin' old loon like to have stuck a harpoon into me. But I forgive you all. Joshua goes free, but—"

She was listening intently, hungrily now. What was he going to say? He had told a string of lies, but she sensed the coming of the truth.

"But I ain't goin' through all this for nothing. No, b' George! I come back to help, and get rebuffed. All right. I ain't goin' to be hanged for mutiny. I'm goin' back to the hills."

He did not know that her mind was racing. What was he heading for? Certainly his very incoherence had method to it. But just what sort of trick card was he going to play?

"You can see I'm in a hole," he said almost sobbing. "Every hand against me who never harmed a living thing. In a damned helpless mess, that's what! Same as your father's in a hole, same as Joshua's in a hole. Same as *you* are—"

He drew his chair closer and leaned forward, speaking with a tense, almost whispering eagerness. "Yes, miss, you are in a pickle too—see? But it's different. You've got a way out, which none of the rest of us have."

Blank amazement swept over her face—the first sign of reaction.

"Surprised to hear me say that, eh? Well, look here. You've got the key to everything. There's your father made prisoner by a black baboon and that whimperin' Brass. The boy up above who laid hands on you, he would torture your father just for the fun of hearin' him howl. That's the sort of devil the doughboy is!

"Torture him, burn his hands, shoot him down by inches, fix up some sort of jury rig to stretch him. That is what that young pimple-faced angel would do. But you can stop it."

He saw that the last vestige of color had left Priscilla's cheek. She might have been wearing an alabaster mask with a dab of violet red across her mouth.

"But it won't happen," he hastened to assure her. "I won't let it. Yes, I've still got 'em under my thumb—those killers. They'll do as I say. They'll stand up in a row, and I'll shoot 'em down—one, two, three! Then you and me get into a boat—see? It's got to be that way. I can't go without help. It 'll have to be you."

His words began to pour out in increasing rapidity, a crescendo of excitement, of frenzy. "You and me and the gold. Got to have gold. Can't buy a rotten potato in this country without you have gold pouring from your hand.

"You see your father freed. You see Joshua freed. You free yourself. Your enemies drop like ninepins. You win the game—see? You and me to the hills. We stay under cover for awhile, then to the camps. How we'll live! There ain't any girls up there, they tell me.

"The miners travel miles just to

look at an old woman. You with that rig you got on—painted up, singin' songs! Good Lord, lady, we'll own the whole damn country—just you and—"

It was as far as he got. A stinging blow on the mouth from something hurtling across the cabin. The girl leaped from the bunk, throwing the first thing she could reach—the sextant—and she stood there now, her chest heaving, her eyes blazing in fury.

The instrument fell clattering to the deck, leaving a cut across Swope's mouth. Staggering backward to the bulkhead, he steadied himself. His face blanched, and a trickle of blood came from his lips.

They faced each other like two wild animals, the weaker one waiting helpless for a return attack; the stronger, crouching forward, his hands opened like two claws before him.

It was a situation in which even a man of Swope's uncanny poise would not forbear to leap upon his assailant and tear her to pieces.

But Swope wiped his mouth; he seemed to shrug his shoulders to shake off the tenseness that was cramping him. His upper lip curled, showing the reddened teeth.

"I won't stay on that tack, my little catamount. I'm through with that tack. The hell with pretending. The hell with you—you damned little skit, paintin' yourself up for a bunch of sousing muckers!"

"All right. They're better'n I am. You wouldn't paint up for me. No! You'll try to come aboard me with any weapon you can lay your hooks on! Well, let's play different."

He stepped to her, and, despite the fact that she shrank back, darting behind the table, he had her wrist in the vise of his hand.

"Where's the money you skinned those drunks out of? Where is it? No more hedgin'. I want it. You'll cough it up. Where is it—answer sharp, or I'll break you!"

She came to her knees with the pain. But the very touch of his hand seemed to break the intangible fear sway which a moment before he held over her. He was no longer the suave, aloof devil, breathing poison into the room. He was only a man.

In that brief moment a flash of light came to her. He had power over them all—the three henchmen, the skipper, the unlucky old Joshua, the helpless girl. But she also had a certain power—she knew where that gold was hidden. Even old Joshua did not know its last hiding place. And the skipper had not until this night known that it existed.

She would hold that secret until the last ditch. It might serve its place. If she gave it up now, then what was there left for Swope to do but to finish up his game in good shape and shove off again for the tule swamps? One thing was left—he would kill her father and the faithful Joshua.

And now, she was assured, he would take her along with him.

"You won't tell?" he muttered softly. He had in a measure gotten back his poise. There was scarcely a trace of exasperation in his voice. "All right. I'm satisfied. You'll tell shortly. In ten minutes you'll tell. When you hear your father howlin'—then you'll tell."

He slipped out of the cabin, slamming the door and locking it.

She heard him walk back toward the steerage—a soft padding of canvas shoes, like a carrion-eating animal prowling excitedly toward a meal.

Throwing herself bodily against the door, she started to pound. But then abruptly stopped.

Swope had said: "When you hear your father—"

She listened with a frantic intensity as if to catch the sound of a pin falling.

Her heart began to pound, and she clutched it. The thumping was so loud that she imagined herself deafened.



Chivalry on the Subway

By LAURANCE M. HARE

The dilemma of the man who realized he had neglected to give his seat to the boss's wife and its startling sequel

WITH a gesture, Mr. George Linden summoned the office boy to his desk. He handed the youth a small envelope, a five dollar bill and a slip of paper upon which was written a name and address.

"Run down to the nearest florist," Mr. Linden directed, "and order a bunch of violets sent to the address on that slip and have them inclose the envelope in the box. Bring the change back to me. I'll be responsible for your absence."

These were explicit instructions, but Linden had had a long experience with office boys of varying degrees of intelligence and the occasion was too important for any mistake to be made.

As the boy retreated across the office, George's brow puckered. He called and the boy returned to his desk.

"Never mind now," said Mr. Linden, extending his hand for the money and envelope. "I'll take care of it myself later on."

"Yes, sir." The office boy turned to depart, but George restrained him.

"By the way, Henry," he said, "it might be good for you to remember that when you have a duty to perform, do it yourself and don't delegate it to somebody else. You may go now."

Henry agreed perfectly with Mr. Linden and went. He covered his mouth with his hand so that his snicker might be mistaken for a cough and

winked knowingly at the nearest stenographer.

Yes, Mr. Linden had a duty to perform, a duty to which he had devoted a good deal of thought and worry during the last fifteen hours, and he had nearly committed the indiscretion against which he had just warned Henry. There was no doubt that it was a matter demanding his personal attention.

He would not be able to deliver the flowers until he went home at night. He must wait. It was a particularly delicate position and his apology must be profound and absolute, for he had unwittingly insulted the boss's wife.

Being assistant salesmanager of the National Sign Company, he aspired to the position of salesmanager when Mr. Barker should be promoted. It was Mrs. Barker whom he had insulted, and he now saw his hopes and ambitions tumbling about him in utter ruin.

He knew that the destinies of nations often depended on the whims and and fancies of the wives of diplomats and statesmen, and he saw no hope for himself if Mrs. Barker refused to accept his apologies.

He sat gazing long and enviously, as he had often done before, at a door marked "Private," on the other side of which was Mr. Barker's smug office. He reflected on various things, tried to vindicate himself for what he had done and deplored the lack of chivalry in the present generation, especially that part of it that rides the subway.

So far as he was concerned, chivalry was dead. But to put it less severely, chivalry was just about kicking its last kick. He wished devoutly that it had kicked just a little harder the night before, whacked him square on the shin and made him relinquish his seat in the train to Mrs. Barker.

Like a good many other men, Mr. Linden's attitude on this subject was that if he gave up his seat in the subway every time he saw a lady standing, he would never have a seat and it was

a long ride after a day's work, from the southern end of Manhattan Island to One Hundred and Sixteenth Street where he lived. Besides, most of the women to whom a man might offer his seat were just painted flappers who sit down mostly for the purpose of crossing their legs and showing as much of them as possible.

And some of them were just idiotic enough to brand a fellow as a masher and get him into a lot of trouble in return for his kindheartedness. Therefore, George had found that the best expedient was to sit as if you were deaf, dumb and blind and read your tabloid.

That's what he had been doing the night before when he thought he recognized a feminine voice. He looked up, but as he **didn't** have his farsight glasses on because he had been reading, he had not been sure that the woman was Mrs. Barker.

She was talking industriously to a lady who sat next but one to George and her profile was toward him. He did not know her well enough to identify her from that angle and he was in a quandary as to just what to do.

He thought at first of putting on his glasses to look at her. But that would scarcely do if she caught him at it, so he changed his mind. It might not be Mrs. Barker at all.

In either case, if he offered her his seat, he would either have to ask the woman beside him to move or else Mrs. Barker would have to adjourn her conversation with her companion.

George didn't know what to do, so he did nothing. That was one of the precepts he had always taught salesmen—"When in doubt, don't."

If the lady were Mrs. Barker, he reflected, it was her place to speak first anyway, and he went back to his paper.

As the train moved on uptown, George was still conscious of the familiarity of the voice. It made him uneasy. At Ninety-Sixth Street he risked another glance at its owner.

She had shifted her position so that her back was to him. He construed this as a deliberate move on her part, for there was a peculiar self-consciousness in her bearing and speech that indicated to him that she had seen him.

He was sure of her identity now, but it was too late to give himself away by offering his seat. He would simply have to continue his simulation of ignorance.

At the next station, the woman beside Mr. Linden left the train, leaving the seat between him and Mrs. Barker's friend vacant. But Mrs. Barker did not sit down. She continued to stand with her back almost squarely to George and her self-consciousness more evident than before.

It was proof enough that she had seen him and resented his not recognizing her. She never had liked him any too well anyway.

George went home from the subway station in a despondent mood. The whole affair had been so trivial, yet he realized that it was from just such little acorns that giant oaks are grown. His one ambition was to become sales-manager of the National Sign Company, and he saw in this incident the makings of his ruin.

His cogitations were now interrupted when Mr. Barker himself emerged through the door at which George had been staring, and came toward him.

"Have you got those expense accounts looked over yet, Linden?" he asked rather sharply, George thought.

"Ah—no, I haven't, Mr. Barker. I'll have them ready in about an hour. I'm sorry to keep you waiting."

"Well, snap into it. They're late now and I've got to O. K. 'em before they can go through."

He departed as suddenly as he had come. George stared after him. There had been no "good morning" nor greeting of any sort. That was unlike Barker.

Of course, he might have indigestion or a toothache, but George was willing

to lay his money on the bet that Mrs. Barker had told her husband about the subway affair and that he was peeved.

Hurriedly, but with half his mind on his personal predicament, George went through the weekly "swindle" sheets of the sales force. Within half an hour after he had sent two reports to Barker's office, ready for the sales-manager's signature of approval, George was summoned to the office by the big man's secretary.

"Say," Barker demanded, "what's this business of a twelve-dollar hotel bill for Jennings on the 24th of May?"

Mr. Linden took the report and studied it. "I must have overlooked that item," he confessed. "Funny I didn't see it."

"Yea. Funny like a black eye. What's the matter, Linden, you gettin' feeble-minded? Look up that guy Jennings and find out about it. I delegated this work to you so I wouldn't have to do it myself, but if you can't do any better than that, I'll have to find somebody else. Take the rest of these along and go over 'em again."

George retreated humbly from the tirade and went back to his own desk to look up Mr. Jennings's routing. The salesman was due at the home office the last of the week. George decided to take up the matter then, and with trembling hands, he filed the swindle sheet in his desk.

On top of his desk lay a mountain of work. It was a blurred mass before his eyes. With nervous fingers, he shuffled some papers aimlessly about, increasing the chaotic condition that already existed.

There was no need for Barker to be so blamed ugly, he thought. Everybody makes mistakes once in awhile. Mrs. Barker must have made an awful row to have the boss act this way.

It was not fear of either of them that made George nervous, it was the disaster to his hopes that might result from their attitude.

He sighed and sent a bunch of or-

ders to the manufacturing department without having their credit investigated. Two-thirds of his mind was framing an apology to Mrs. Barker and feverishly anxious to deliver it with the flowers; the other third was engineering the work of his hands.

Absently, he threw in the waste basket the swindle sheets Barker had told him to go over again. They were followed by a memorandum of a meeting of department heads for the next afternoon which, as a consequence, he completely forgot.

The rest of the accumulated litter on his desk was got rid of in an equally adroit manner, and then, just before noon, he started work on a form letter introducing a new type of highway bulletin board which the company was putting out.

He finished the first draft of the letter by midafternoon. At three o'clock, he chucked the letter in a drawer, locked up and left for the day.

It was not his habit to quit early, but he had no desire to be made the subject of Barker's wrath for the rest of the afternoon, so he bought the flowers and took the subway uptown. His heart pounded and little beads of cold perspiration broke out on his brow.

This was not fear, but because he was not by nature a humble man, and he found it hard to subjugate his pride to the task before him.

When he rang the Barkers' doorbell, he was admitted by a saucy maid. His card was taken in, but the maid returned to say that Mrs. Barker was out.

"Any message?" she demanded.

"No," said George, and departed with his flowers.

He could have left them, but it never occurred to him that the maid had told him the truth, and he had no idea of leaving flowers for a lady who refused to see him.

The only other expedient he could think of was to write his apology and

mail it—a slow and unsatisfactory business with things becoming more and more involved at the office.

He lay awake for a long time that night, thinking alternately of his apology to Mrs. Barker and the form letter for the new bulletin boards.

In the morning, things began to happen. He reached the office tired and haggard. Barker had not yet arrived. George went to his desk and started writing his letter to Mrs. Barker.

Barker came in at ten o'clock. He called George to his office. He threw at his assistant the batch of orders that had been sent to the manufacturing department the morning before. They had been sent back to have their credit looked up.

"These," said Barker, "were returned to us after you left the office yesterday afternoon. What's the idea of sending them through before they go to the credit department? Do you want to bankrupt the place, you dumb ox? What's the matter with your head? Are you in love or something? Send those orders to credit and make it snappy.

"Incidentally, Linden, business goes on in this office until five o'clock. I tried to find you yesterday at three thirty, but you had gone. You are required to stay here as long as the rest of us. If you have any business outside the office, let me know before you leave. How about those swindle sheets I sent back to you yesterday? Get a move on. Don't stand there like you were half dead."

George swallowed his temper and said: "Yes, sir. I'll have the reports ready very shortly."

He left the office hurriedly. He sent the orders to the credit department, then he started a search for the swindle sheets.

It took him twenty minutes to go all through his desk and discover that he had no swindle sheets. He returned to Barker's office.

"I can't find those expense ac-

counts," he said. "Are you sure you haven't them, Mr. Barker?"

"Sure? Of course, I'm sure! Why the hell would I be asking you for 'em if I had 'em myself? Get busy and find 'em. If you don't I'll take 'em out of your hide, you little shrimp."

George started for the door.

"Hey!" Barker called him back. "How about that form letter? Don't ask me what form letter. Have you got it ready?"

"I'll have the final draft typed just as soon as I find the reports, Mr. Barker."

"Never mind the reports. You can look for them afterward. I've got other things to do besides wait for you. I want that letter right off."

Mr. Barker got the letter right off. George had polished it up in his mind during the night. He struck it off on his typewriter and sent it in.

Then he tried to think what he had done with the swindle sheets. He had a vague recollection of having handled them the day before, but he couldn't remember where they were.

Suddenly there was a loud roar from the direction of Mr. Barker's sanctum. Everybody in the office looked up. George heard his name shouted loud enough to be heard all over the building.

As he hurried across the room, all the clerks and stenographers ceased their work, winked and grinned and sat back to enjoy the fun.

Barker was standing up, the draft of the letter in his hand. His face was red with anger. He lunged at George, but George gave ground. Discretion is the better part of valor. He was a smaller man than Barker.

"This is a fine letter," bellowed the salesmanager. "What do you mean by wasting my time reading junk like this. I thought you could write a sales letter. Why, this wouldn't sell hot soup to a starving Russian, you lunk-head. It sounds like you were apologizing for being alive. Sounds like it

was an imposition to ask anybody to consider our new signs, instead of being a favor to the public to put them on the market.

"By the Lord Harry, this is the climax. I've stood all I'm going to from you. I—"

"Calm yourself, Mr. Barker," said George. "What's the matter with the letter?"

"What's the matter with it? Calm myself? Oh, Lord! Calm myself! Listen to this."

He read in a mocking tone from the letter. "'We humbly invite your investigation of these boards when our salesman calls on his next trip.' And this: 'Thanking you for your courtesy in allowing us to introduce this product to you, we remain—' Bunk! And you call it a sales letter. Get out of here with it. This office ain't big enough to hold us both and I'll see at the meeting this afternoon that one of us goes."

George took the letter and retreated. He had no recourse, no defense. He realized that the letter was apologetic and humble. It was a result of his frame of mind.

There was no excuse for it and he had none to offer. He could do nothing but mail his letter to Mrs. Barker and trust to her graciousness to calm her husband's wrath.

He went to lunch at noon, but he was not hungry. The end of everything was in plain view. After the meeting that afternoon he would be a man without a job. He went back to his desk.

Just before the meeting was called, he received a letter. It was not a business letter. He tore it open and read the note written in a feminine hand:

DEAR MR. LINDEN:

Please accept my sincere apologies for not speaking to you in the subway the other night. I know it was horrid of me, but I knew that if I spoke that you would insist on my taking your seat, and I had such a lame back that if I had sat down, I couldn't have got up again without a great deal of pain.

My maid told me that you called yes-

terday afternoon when I was out. I was at the doctor's for treatment. I didn't know that you knew I was ill, but it was nice of you to call. I should have written this sooner, but I know you will appreciate my position and forgive me for being rude. I'm going to have Will bring you home to supper some night.

Very sincerely,
GLADYS JORDON BARKER.

George laid the letter on the desk and stared at it. What a fool he had been! But it was too late now. The only chance he had was to ask Mrs. Barker to explain the matter and soothe her husband's wrath.

It was obvious to him now that Barker knew nothing of the subway incident, and that all the trouble had been due to his own nervousness and worry. A man can't give his mind to two important subjects and do justice to either one.

The call to the meeting broke in on his thoughts.

George walked to the conference room like a man headed for the gallows, taking the letter with him.

The meeting would probably finish him, but he decided to make an effort to vindicate himself, with Mrs. Barker's apology to help him out. The general manager presided at this conference.

"Gentlemen," he began, "this meeting has been called to announce a change in the personnel of the organization, and to discuss various changes in our policy."

"Mr. Chairman," interrupted Barker, rising to his feet, "there's a change in the personnel of the sales department to be announced and I want to do it right off, so you can make the rest of your changes accordingly. I've been tormented by that so-called assistant of mine as long as I want to be. This office isn't big enough for both of us. Either he's going out or I am—suit yourself. He can make more mistakes in half a day than I can correct in a week. He just lost a batch of

salesmen's expense accounts and this morning he handed me a sales letter that wouldn't sell fur coats to a freezing Eskimo. That's only a sample, but it's the last sample."

"Yes," piped up the manager of the manufacturing department, "and yesterday, he sent me a dozen or more large orders without sending them through the credit department. We just happened to discover the error before production.

"That kind of mistake is expensive in time and money."

The general manager listened quietly to these orations. When they finished, he looked expectantly around the table.

"Any more complaints?" he asked. When no one took the floor, he turned to George. "Have you anything to say for yourself, Mr. Linden?"

"Only this," said George. "That I admit everything these men have told you. But for the last two days I have been laboring under a considerable nervous strain. If you will read this letter, I think you will understand it partly. I supposed myself to be in the same position in which this lady finds herself, and considering the personage, I believe you will agree with me that it was the cause for a good deal of worry."

The general manager took the letter and read it through.

"I don't know anything about the incident mentioned here," he finally said to George, "and I can't say that I understand why it should give you cause for worry. But what I do know is that you have been laboring under a mental strain for some time past. You have, in reality, been doing the work of two men and the only wonder to me is that you have kept things running as smoothly as you have."

He turned to Barker. "I'm mighty glad, Barker, that you made the suggestion you did. It saves us the trouble of firing you. We shall be very willing to accept your resignation. As a salesmanager, all you have done is

delegate all your work to Linden and keep that chair in your office warm on a salary of ten thousand a year.

"We'll give you a week's time to find another job. We can't conscientiously recommend you as an executive, but we can vouch for you as a salesman. If such a recommendation will do you any good in your search for employment, we will be glad to give it.

"Linden," he concluded, "you will assume the duties of salesman when Mr. Barker leaves. In future, there will be no assistant. You can, however, have a chief clerk and all the minor clerks and stenographers you need. Mr. Barker's salary will go to

you and the company will save about half of your pay to say nothing of the increased efficiency of the staff which we expect under your regime."

When George recovered from his surprise sufficiently to speak, he held out his hand to the general manager.

"Thank you," he said.

He turned to Barker.

"With the consent of the company officials," he announced, "I'll be glad to retain you as chief clerk, Mr. Barker, at whatever salary the company agrees to pay. I assure you there are no hard feelings."

"Go to blazes!" said Barker and he stalked out of the room.

THE END



SPRING

DOWN in the stable the ol' mare is lickin'
The new colt that got here last week.
Out in the pasture, a new calf is friskin'
Around the ol' cow like a streak.

Ol' sow is sucklin' new pigs in the barn lot,
An' out in the shed, on some straw,
A litter o' six white an' black mongrel puppies
Is crawlin' all over their ma.

Birds built a nest in the tree by the tool-house;
They knowed they was goin' to need
That nest, an' by golly, they're workin' like beavers,
'Cause they've got new youngsters to feed.

Ol' cat's asleep in a box in the kitchen,
With five kittens mussin' her fur,
An' if them other critters is proud o' their babies,
Well, they ain't got nothin' on her.

Thar's a ol' duck, comin' up from the frog pond,
With ten baby ducks on her trail,
An' thar's a ol' hen squattin' over her fam'ly,
Which is peepin' out under her tail.

Back in the house, I can hear my wife singin'
In a low voice that's croonin' an' deep,
An' I know what it means—it's the tone that she uses
To sing the new baby to sleep!

Will Thomas Withrow.



Restless Guns

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EYES WEST!"

*When two knights of old, tossed down in the midst of the cow country,
hear the cry of a lady faire things are bound to happen*

CHAPTER X.

POPULARITY.

THERE were moments in the irksome hours of his imprisonment when Norman Trent saw, without mirth, a grotesque humor in the situation. For a conservative, studiously conventional New Yorker of habitual sobriety and traditional respectability to have the very muse of romantic tragedy select him as her exponent was near enough to satiric comedy in all conscience. But it challenged sober credulity or the liveliest fancy, that a whole countryside should accept him in the incongruous rôle and celebrate his name almost to the point of electing him to the pantheon of a crude mythology.

New Mexico was essentially a land of traditions from which it neither could nor would escape, and the atmosphere was surcharged with fantastic mysticism from border to border. Hard-headed settlers came from New England without sentiment or illusion in their souls, and seemed quickly to embrace and adopt the extravagant superstitions and legendary lore of the cliff-dwelling aborigines.

An amusing lie was more acceptable than a wholesome truth, and a towering fabrication of improbable fancies stood a better chance for belief than a sober statement of obvious fact.

He felt that the intangible element of chance, variously accepted by the sober or the frivolous as destiny, fate, or luck, had played a series of sorry

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pranks with him, and such reflections were undeniably disquieting.

A most practical and unromantic traveler, for his age, he had stepped from a railway coach on sudden impulse, and been stamped in an instant with the brand of Cain. Moved by a gallant motive to guard a woman's peace of mind and security, he had become party to a conspiracy, denying what he would have admitted, and practicing the arts of the confirmed casuist.

Every attempt to escape from the toils had plunged him deeper into the maze of mixed tragedy and comedy, and scarcely a fortnight after leaving New York he found himself sitting in a prison cell, heavily manacled, and soberly credited with a criminal record that challenged the most desperate achievements of all the devil's disciples of the lawless Southwest.

It irked him, too, that a mature person of Sheriff Kemp's local prominence should bombastically plume himself upon the distinction of running down and capturing the alleged prince of outlaws.

Ira Kemp, with small ability and less acuteness, already regarded himself as a living terror to malefactors, an astute detective, and the stalwart champion of law and order in an unorganized territory which had not yet gained a conception of those institutions.

Norman was shocked and angry, but scarcely astonished, when Althea Lane was brought to the town jail and locked in one of the four cells, held by order of the sheriff as a suspicious person and a material witness.

No one could tell how long the captives might be kept waiting for trial, but it was understood that they were to be taken to the courthouse at Santa Fe, though Kemp promised the local residents that the inevitable hanging should take place at the county seat—a moral lesson and an entertainment combined.

From a small window in their cell,

Norman and Ronald could view a broad section of the main street and the plank walk, and they learned much of the fluctuations of popular opinion by observation.

It was a favorite pastime, now, in Split Cañon, to stand on the street opposite the jail and regard the window of the murderers' cell curiously and speculatively, while discussions of crime and depravity waxed furious.

Hard-working miners and cowboys appeared as morbid as the idlers of the town, and people made excursions from the country to stand and gape at a window.

The guards in the jail soon lost their awe and fear of their captives. They were under strict orders, but were not trained to the spirit of rigid discipline.

A naturally jolly young giant from the county seat, a cowboy named Seth Corwin, was the most friendly of the sentinels, and he frankly established himself on terms of familiarity with the prisoners. During his hours of duty he gave Norman and Ronald the news of the day, and from him they learned the names of many of the citizens that passed in the daily parade on the plank walk.

Among the cowboys from the RX ranch three prominent survivors of the Little Alamo appeared almost daily, to scowl savagely and apostrophize the cell window. Seth Corwin pointed them out, naming them as Red Jukes, Fishbone Marlin, and Luke Wilder.

Impromptu mass meetings were held on the plank walk, and from time to time there were spirited demonstrations. Stones were hurled at the window while the excited citizens howled in derision and rage, and disorder continued until guards went out from the lower room of the jail and dispersed the agitators.

One day of unusual quiet and order was explained by Seth Corwin to the mildly curious prisoners. The attention of the populace had been tem-

porarily diverted by news of the latest escapade of the mysterious Black Parson.

"That boy's a lulu, sure!" chuckled Seth. "Always plays the lone hand. This time he came right into this county, bold as a lion, with Sheriff Kemp sittin' on the job and layin' for just such fellers as the Parson.

"Nobody can tell how or when he got on the train, but a little bit west of Bitter Springs he made the express messenger jump off, so's he could go through the packages in the express car.

"Then, sir, he walked right into the first passenger car, cool as a horned toad, made his apologies to all the passengers for disturbin' 'em, and appointed a committee of two to collect the valuables and cash.

"Most of the men was armed, I reckon, but nobody dared draw a long breath, say nothin' of a gun. He held 'em, they say, like one o' them mesmerizers in the theater, all of 'em lookin' pop-eyed right into the muzzles of his long six-guns.

"The fool conductor took too long to make up his mind, when the Parson told 'im to pull the bell rope and stop the train, and the Parson put a bullet through one of his eyes, after tellin' 'em that's what he'd do."

"I wonder if any one believes, now, that I saw him hold up the stage?" mused Norman.

"Course you saw 'im!" declared Seth heartily. "I believe it, for one. I don't think you're the kind to lie about it, and—what's more, I don't think you're the kind to butcher two good-natured fellows like them on the stagecoach. You and Browne, here, don't look it—specially Browne."

Ronald flushed self consciously.

"I don't think I could even develop into a *bad* man," he said with a naïve gravity that brought a grin to the mobile face of Seth Corwin. "I believe the men of my family are—a little hot tempered, but—"

His berserker madness in the Little Alamo episode, as described to him repeatedly by Norman, seemed to prey upon his mind as he reviewed it, and his friend found a quaint pathos in his growing anxiety about inherited tendencies toward vicious instincts. Inherently mild and conscientious, his mind went back a thousand years to seek the source of his savagery in wild Saxon ancestry.

The blind father of Althea Lane was permitted to visit her daily for brief periods, but Corwin reported that he behaved like a lost soul, deprived of the solace of her companionship. Norman saw him frequently from the window, wandering disconsolately along the street, tapping with his walking stick to pick his way over inequalities of ground and among the other pedestrians.

Most of the people made way for him considerately, but Buxton's cowboys had lately included him in their hostility toward his daughter with unreasoning prejudice.

The burly and overbearing Red Jukes suddenly kicked a small crate in front of him as he passed the general store, causing him to trip before the groping stick discovered it, and he sprawled in a painful tumble at full length on the plank walk, losing his stick and the smoked glasses that he usually wore to conceal the unpleasant glassy stare of his wide open eyes.

Other passers-by rebuked the bully as much as they dared, and hastened to lift Bill Evans to his feet, brush the dust from his clothing, and recover his stick and spectacles, but he displayed no conspicuous resentment. The indignant watchers at the jail window saw him smile and thank the ones who aided him, and go patiently on his way.

"It's a good thing he's got something to do while his girl's locked up," observed Seth Corwin.

"What?" Norman inquired curiously.

"Since the girl quit her job at the

store to get married, he's had a little shop up back of the mill at the mine. Mr. Spindell said he could have it. He grinds knives and tools for the mill, and folks take razors and axes and knives and everything for him to fix up for 'em. Helps him to earn a little and have something to think about besides his troubles."

"You keep posted on most things, Seth," Norman remarked. "You ought to know where Bill Evans came from, and why he came to Split Cañon. He has a refined manner, and speaks uncommonly well."

"Drifted in with other driftwood, that's all I know. Some say he was a school-teacher back East; some think he had money and went broke on a wildcat mine somewhere before he lost his eyesight."

"He'll smile, but he won't talk, and he won't drink—so nobody get's anything out of 'im. Most strangers take a shine to little Althy, and then want to know all about Bill. I don't live in Split Cañon anyhow, and I can't tell you any more."

"I don't take *shines*, Seth," said Norman, a little brusquely, "but I am interested in worthy people that seem to need sympathy and help."

Next morning it was reported that the prisoners were to be taken from Split Cañon in four days, to go to Santa Fe for trial. The county seat coveted the distinction of so sensational a trial, but Sheriff Kemp himself advocated the change of venue on account of the high tide of feeling among cattle men of the county and the likelihood of hostile demonstrations.

Split Cañon resented the approaching loss of its chief attraction. With the jail empty there would be a return to the former dull routine of life, and even the unseen, but constantly feared, Black Parson would doubtless tire of that hunting ground and transfer his interests to another region.

Rance Buxton, as acting town marshal, guaranteed law enforcement and

order, but his men took a holiday and gathered recruits from among the miners and townspeople for a practical expression of public opinion in the form of a street parade.

The sheriff and the marshal refused permission for such a celebration, but did nothing to prevent it.

The prisoners saw a crudely lettered white banner raised in front of the jail on two poles. It was framed in black crape, and bore the names of the lamented Sam Lane, Tim Sharpe, Bull Varick, and Colorado Quinn.

It appeared, then, that the demonstration was directed largely at Althea Lane, whose detention at the jail had sharpened the feeling against her.

A fiery red wig of the theatrical style was hung upon the banner like a scalp, and that readily understood symbol quickly roused the gathering throng to varying degrees of indignation and ribaldry.

Speeches were made from a barrel top by Red Jukes and Fishbone Marlin, calculated to inflame the minds of the populace. Old Mose Dudley of the gambling hall was introduced as one of the town's influential and substantial citizens, and he found voice to lament the decadence of the fairest hamlet in the territory. With some encouragement and prompting from the committee of arrangements, he recommended the extirpation of all undesirable citizens from Split Cañon, with special reference to the type represented by the inmates of the jail, both male and female.

During tumultuous and prolonged applause the general store's stock of vegetables was depleted and three windows were broken in the front of the jail.

Blind Bill Evans emerged from his dwelling in the store building, evidently to learn the cause of the unusual excitement, and a small cabbage knocked off his hat and his spectacles.

Recovering his possessions, he discreetly returned to his refuge, amid

boisterous howls and cheers, but the more sober citizens observed the by-play with disapproval and noted anxiously that the crowd was drifting into a dangerous mood which might easily lead to developments beyond the control of the authorities.

Red Jukes headed a parade, with fifes and drums, and marched up to the mill and back to the southern extremity of the town, then countermarched to the starting point and began another round of speeches.

Ira Kemp was an experienced and fairly capable peace officer, and while he failed to interfere with the proceedings, he betrayed his estimate of the developments by visiting the jail and directing the guards to nail planks and timbers across the inside of the front door.

It was a reasonable and justifiable precaution, but the noise of the hammering attracted the attention of the crowd and aggravated the situation.

Little Joab Taney feared for the windows and recently painted façade of the hotel, and set up drinks for the committee, of which Red Jukes was the chairman. The committee reciprocated with another round of strong waters in honor of the hospitable inn-keeper, and then the chairman was inspired to make another speech.

"What's the good o' this meetin'?" he demanded of the crowd. "What's the good of all my talk and everybody else's talk, if we don't do nothin'?"

"I know what's goin' to happen, an' so do you all. The worst, low-down, ornery bums that every disgraced the good name o' this fine town are goin' over to Santa Fe, an' we'll never see 'em again. They may get hung, an' they may not. 'Th' judge over there don't know 'em as we do, an' they're both of 'em slick talkers. Mebbe they might get off on self-defense, mebbe they'll get some slick lawyers to talk for 'em.

"What I'm gettin' at is: we got 'em right here now, an' we know well

enough what ought to be done to 'em. You can't see 'em, but they're right up there behind that lil ol' winder up there.

"That cock-eyed sheriff from up-country has gone an' boarded up the door, but what's that to us? Yer can nail up boards, an' yer can knock 'em down again, can't yer? Well, friends—"

The success of the oration was apparent before the chairman could end it. A score of the more daring men in the crowd began to yell, drowning the voice of the chairman, and they moved boldly against the barricaded door and ripped up some loosened planks from the sidewalk to use as wrecking tools.

A rifle was poked through the bars of a front window, and a shot whistled over the heads of the crowd.

The action was not unexpected, and cheers and catcalls greeted it, but the men with the planks fell back discreetly. A definite gesture had been made, and they were content to wait for more speeches and a higher tide of sentiment.

"We may not go to Santa Fe," remarked Norman Trent significantly, as he and Ronald sat listening to the sounds of the demonstration.

CHAPTER XI.

THE UNINVITED GUEST.

THE jail was in a state of siege in the evening. Sheriff Kemp had extra guards ready to resist an assault in force, and sharpshooters stationed on the roof to keep men of the mob from coming over the roofs of the adjoining buildings.

He brought Althea Lane into the cell where Norman and Ronald were, concentrating his prisoners.

"Can't tell what will happen," he said anxiously, but with official gravity. "If those fellers do get inside the building, we can hold them out of this room a long time."

He gave a key to Seth Corwin, who was on duty.

"If trouble starts," he explained, "take off those leg irons from the prisoners and give 'em some clubs to use in a free-for-all. If you see that you're all going to lose out, take off the handcuffs and let 'em go. I don't want any lynching."

Althea was stoical. She sat down in the middle of the room and maintained a composure that the men could not equal. From time to time she heard her name uttered in the street, accompanied with coarse epithets and jests, sometimes with startling threats, but she scarcely changed color or betrayed any emotion.

Rance Buxton joined the sheriff, coming over the roof from the hotel.

"I've done all I can," he reported. "Talked myself black in the face, but my boys from the ranch are part of 'em getting crazy drunk, and the rest are mighty ugly. I've threatened and coaxed, but it didn't do no good."

"Wish I could get a squad of cavalry and a Gatling gun!" declared the sheriff. "I'd have your main street cleaned in short order."

"What for?" demanded Buxton. "You wouldn't go and hurt a whole lot of good, law-abiding folks here, for the sake of three jailbirds, would you? Sensible thing would be to kick these scalawags and criminals out right now, and save damage to the property."

"I haven't seen any law-abiding citizens in this part o' the county," retorted the sheriff angrily. "Those outside are about as bad as those inside. If they try to break in here somebody 'll get hurt."

"I'm sheriff o' the county and I'm responsible for prisoners. Got a fine dressing-down from the Governor for that shindy in the greaser's adobe, and I had nothing to do with it. I aim to keep out o' trouble with Santa Fe, and I'm not going to have any private civil war round here like they had in Lincoln County."

"Who said anything about a war? A lynching bee ain't a war, and a whole lot of lynchings are justified, and save legal work and expense."

"Henry Spindell is in town, up to the mine," the sheriff announced significantly, "and he's not the man to stand for lynching and anarchy in a town he has anything to do with. Let 'im tell his miners and workmen to come down here and clean up your crew of cow-punchers, and there wouldn't be no more RX ranch."

"If he wants to try it, I'll take 'im on," snarled Buxton, touched in his vanity. "I never did think Spindell was God, if he does own half of Wall Street, and most o' New Mexico!"

"You're acting town marshal," exclaimed the sheriff sharply. "You 'tend to your duty, Rance, and quit talking about lynching and fighting."

Eben Hoskins, a young deputy, came from the guard room downstairs and spoke to the sheriff. He had been sent on an errand to the county seat and carried some papers for the sheriff.

"Thing's are sure gettin' thick outside," he said, "but I came down the arroyo out back and they let me in the back door."

"An', say," he added, his voice thrilling to the announcement of important news, "the Parson sure had done it now, an' no mistake. Big shipment from the mine to-day—four-horse wagon, an' four guards with driver."

"'Bout four miles short o' the railroad the Black Parson ambushed 'em, and shot all five. Then, they say, he drove the wagon off himself. The marshal over to Bitter Springs, he got out a big posse and trailed the wagon a couple o' miles, but he lost out on it. They think the Parson's got a cache in the mountains."

Sheriff Kemp cursed soulfully.

"And there's some fellers would like my job!" he groaned. "I s'pose you know that's the third time the Parson has hit the Spindell folks."

"The fourth time, then," corrected Norman Trent pointedly. "There was a mine shipment on the stage when I saw him hold it up, though he failed to get it."

Kemp scowled, but looked at the prisoner thoughtfully.

"You may be right," he allowed grudgingly. "I reckon it 'll come out at your trial. Three times is bad enough, anyhow. It's a wonder Henry Spindell don't hire a whole army of Pinkertons and fetch 'em out here."

Split Cañon's main street was lighted by the various lamps and lanterns that hung in front of the stores and resorts, but the illumination did not satisfy Red Jukes's mob. They piled wood and rubbish in the middle of the street and made a rousing bonfire to keep up the spirits of the potential rioters.

Bill Evans, evidently coming down from his little shop at the mill, and taking the sandy street to avoid passing through the boisterous hoodlums on the plank walk, proceeded to march straight into the heart of the roaring flames. He was hurrying nervously, with his stick extended in front of him, and seemed oblivious even to the heat, smoke, and crackling of the fire.

The crowd laughed and jeered, apparently willing to let him take a scorching, but Fishbone Marlin had heart enough to dart forward and swing the blind man out of danger in the nick of time.

Ronald saw the incident, grew excited, and described it to his companions.

Althea turned pale and clenched her hands as though in agony.

"Your old daddy is suffering a whole lot of hatred and contempt in town, all through your doings, young woman," remarked Kemp. "An old man so blind he can't see bright flames ought to be taken care of."

Althea set her lips in a hard, straight line, and neither spoke nor looked at the sheriff.

"You going to spend the night here,

sheriff?" inquired Rance Buxton with a suspicion of irony.

"Don't know's I am. Are you, marshal?"

"I might, an' I might not. But when I get ready to go I ain't afraid to go through that crowd out there."

"Hope you don't insinuate I am!" growled the sheriff. "But if I go out there, your cow-punchers are going to hear a piece o' my mind."

The noise in the street steadily increased. Farmers and cowboys from the smaller ranches were coming into town for the evening, and most of the newcomers were quickly infected with the disorderly spirit of the mob.

"Say! Here's old man Spindell right now!" cried Eben Hoskins, who was taking observations from the window.

The sheriff and the marshal muttered imprecations and cautiously advanced to the window.

The powerful mine owner, president of the Coronado Mining and Smelting Company of New York, rode down the street on a handsome Kentucky saddle horse and halted near the bonfire.

He held up his hand in a commanding gesture, but found it difficult to make his voice heard above the noise.

"I want this crowd to disperse!" he shouted, displaying no mean courage. "If we've no means of law enforcement here, I'll wire to Washington and have troops sent at once."

Sporadic and half-hearted outbursts of catcalls and jeers came from the farther margins of the gatherings, but there might have been spirited replies from Jukes and his henchmen if they had had time to collect their wits.

The episode was fated to begin and end with Spindell's speech, for a prodigious diversion came with stunning force from the north end of the town.

There was a great roar like a thunderclap, a burst of fire that curtained the northern sky to the zenith, and the earth under Split Cañon shook and quivered as in an earthquake.

"Th' mine's blew up!" yelled Seth Corwin as he and the other persons in the jail room felt the shock and stared at one another in fright.

Henry Spindell's horse reared in terror, almost unseating the elderly man. But the rider sat fast, put his spurs to use, and galloped hard toward the scene of the explosion.

In a moment the street before the jail and around the bonfire was cleared, and the people were dashing after Spindell in eagerness to learn the extent of the wreck and ruin.

The sheriff and the marshal hurried out and joined the rush, and for half an hour the prisoners and their guards were left alone. Then Kemp and Buxton came back in hot haste, just ahead of the mob that was returning to the jail bent on its destruction.

The sheriff and the marshal were thoroughly alarmed. The mine and the mill had been blown up with a tremendous charge of high explosives, by unknown persons. Spindell and his executives and foreman were leading the mine operatives in fighting the flames that enveloped the wooden structures still left standing. The townspeople and cowboys refused to join in the work, and Red Jukes haranged his followers and incited them to return to the jail and tear it down, if there were no other way of gaining possession of the prisoners.

"Take off these fellers' leg irons," Kemp directed Seth Corwin, "and if things get bad turn 'em loose. I won't be party to a lynching if I can help it, and hell's going to be popping here pretty soon."

"If these fellers do get away," said Rance Buxton grumpily, "it's up to you, sheriff. I wouldn't let a murderer get off, lynching or no lynching."

In the street the bonfire was brightened with fresh fuel, and the mob, now inflamed with drinking and the general excitement, seethed about the jail, threatening at every moment to carry it by a concerted rush.

A wave of men surged suddenly toward the building. Kemp's guards in the lower story fired a volley over their heads. It checked them, but aggravated their insane condition.

Suddenly there was a noticeable lull in the tempest. A voice could be heard by the anxious men in the building, a clear, oratorical voice addressing the mob, and Eben Hoskins reported that the speaker was under the canopy of the hotel porch.

The men in the upper room listened curiously, and were vaguely disturbed by the unfamiliarity of the voice. The newcomer was not a spellbinder of Red Jukes's class. He spoke clearly, in good English, with an impressive enunciation. And, to their greater surprise, he was not seeking to pacify and conciliate the mob; he urged it to greater rashness and positive anarchy.

"Assert your just rights as men," they heard him say. "Tear down this squalid, blighted town—burn it, lay it in ashes! Bring justice to your corrupt and slave-driving politicians—and that means, kill them! Hang them on these trees, and watch them dance in the light of the burning town."

"We've given the millionaires at the mine their medicine. Now, go and get Spindell. Show him how much power he has, when honest men wake up."

"Those prisoners in the jail are *gentlemen* from New York. They are privileged to commit crimes—murder. They're Spindell's kind. See how they have won over your sheriff and your town marshal."

"Kemp and Buxton are up there protecting them; they expect to be well paid for it. Are you going to submit tamely to such oppression, brothers?"

"What's Rance Buxton to you? What does he pay you? Beggars' wages! Show him how you can rope a man—brand him! He's only a hog, but you can make meat of him."

Rance Buxton turned pale, but was able to curse the speaker eloquently from the security of the upper room.

"That's one of those Chicago anarchists!" muttered Sheriff Kemp. "Some of 'em are college men. He's been sent here on Spindell's account."

A wild burst of cheering indicated that agitator had scored a hit, or that he had ended his harangue. The latter proved to be the cause, and the mob swirled out into the middle of the street again, stirred the fire, and set about more determinedly to storm the jail.

A vanguard of some fifty men, armed hurriedly with firebrands and clubs, moved on the building, and Ira Kemp issued quick and peremptory commands.

From the window of the upper room Seth Corwin and Eben Hoskins opened direct fire on the attackers, and were joined by the guard on the ground floor.

Some rioters fell, and the others were again checked for a moment, but it was too late to quell the veritable insurrection that had begun.

The sheriff had a man on the roof, watching for a possible attack from the adjacent housetops, and he sent two more there from below.

Those two had scarcely time to gain their station, mounting through the skylight, when they were heard shouting and firing off their rifles.

"I thought so!" cried Kemp. "They'd try to come that way, but three men can hold off a hundred if they keep a close watch."

The door leading to the narrow hallway outside the cell opened, and the sheriff turned casually, expecting one of the guards to make a report.

"Hands up, gentlemen!" ordered a soft voice, and the lamp light was reflected brightly by the long barrels of two revolvers.

There was authority in the quiet voice and in the shining weapons, and it was not disputed. The two guards promptly let fall their rifles and held up their arms. The sheriff and the marshal froze where they stood and held their hands high.

The man behind the six-shooters was dressed all in black, and his head was enveloped in black cambric, with small holes cut for his eyes.

"The Parson!" gasped Ira Kemp.

"Not regularly ordained," said the masker quickly, in a voice that suggested a smile behind the cambric, "but a minister to the downtrodden and the oppressed, and a priest to the altar of freedom and liberty."

Althea stood erect, very white, and the slender wrists and hands that she held aloft trembled noticeably. Norman and Ronald were standing, with their manacled hands raised.

"The lady and the two murderers may sit down and be at ease for a time," said the Parson pleasantly. "For the others, the slightest indiscretion will mean instant death."

He stood sharply erect and never relaxed, but there was about him a striking freedom of carriage and motion, an uncommon grace. His boots were freshly varnished, with but a thin film of street dust on them. His coat was of the single-breasted frock style, long-skirted, frequently affected by clergymen, and it was doubtless the source of the sobriquet that some early victim of his predatory excursions had fixed upon him.

Althea sank rather limply into her chair, apparently ill and faint, but she kept her head up and never took her eyes from the slender figure behind the shining steel.

"What do you want?" inquired Sheriff Kemp, a little cautiously, a little humbly. "We've no money here, that's certain."

"Money," purred the Parson, "is the last thing in the world. I need it, for a purpose, and so I take it. But my mission in the world is—justice."

Kemp and Buxton relaxed ever so little in their cramped positions of rigid attention. They looked vaguely relieved and hopeful.

"You want to get these prisoners away from here?" queried the sheriff.

"And say—weren't you the man that was addressing the mob out here a few minutes ago?"

"I addressed the men outside," answered the Parson, "and I do *not* want to get the prisoners away from here. It is my duty to turn them over to the men that they in all justice belong to—for justice and condign punishment.

"Do you, men—supposedly agents of justice—know who these prisoners are?"

"The one you call Harry Norman is Norman Trent, son of Simon Osgood Trent, the capitalist and exploiter of Western resources, the man who sits in his New York palace and manipulates the treasures of the earth out of the hands of those who earn them into his own unworthy grasp.

"That is why this youth recognizes no law—but kills as by the instinct of a wild beast, and walks over the earth in the fancied security of wealth.

"The other—is a parasite, to be crushed under heel like vermin. He is Ronald Ingram-Browne, a subject of the British king, son of an idle English capitalist who is a stockholder in the Coronado Mining and Smelting Company and other American enterprises controlled by the grasping talons of Simon Trent and his minions."

"You speak of killing," spoke up Norman Trent boldly. "By what superior instinct did you slaughter two innocent men who guarded the stage coach at the sacrifice of their lives?"

"I kill," replied the Parson, "as God kills! To accomplish great ends and great good. I kill constructively—that more abundant life may come to those who live. The stagecoach guards merited death only in that they obstructed my progress, my mission."

"I say, I believe you're barmy on the crumpet!" ejaculated Ronald recklessly. "You talk for all the world like queer blighters I've heard spouting to the crowds in Hyde Park.

"I'm no capitalist—not half, nor is

my father; I jolly well wish we were. All I could manage, to afford this bally trip through the States—and as for this poor little girl here, that you're scaring into convulsions—"

"The lady is safe," interrupted the Parson a little harshly. "She goes with me, after my work here is done."

"More of your godlike reasoning!" protested Norman, flashing a glance of pity at Althea. "Is a helpless young girl a part of your divine mission?"

"She becomes a part of it," answered the Parson blandly. "She is destined to be a queen. I have horses waiting at the end of the village, and I shall take her away—to a new life—a new heaven and a new earth."

Althea still stared at the masked mystery in fearful fascination, her face colorless and drawn.

"What do you want? What do you want us to do?" Sheriff Kemp asked again.

"Nothing," said the Parson. "I am leaving presently, taking the lady with me. The avenging angels outside are battering down your doors, and they will come—to tell you what to do.

"For the present," he added pompously, "my work is accomplished. I struck Henry Spindell's mine—Simon Trent's mine—and it vanished in smoke. Spindell still lives, but the night is not over.

"This town—cursed with the Midas touch of Spindell and Trent—is doomed. To-morrow's sun will see a barren desert here—purified by fire.

"Come!" he said loftily, turning his masked face toward the girl, "it is time for us to go."

Althea shuddered, shrinking back in the chair, her eyes wide and bright with terror.

"I can't—I wouldn't go—with you," she faltered. "It's too terrible! I'd rather die than have you touch me."

He drew back and seemed to hold himself with greater majesty.

"Would you, then, rather die here and now?" he asked solemnly, and it

seemed that one of the long, slim barrels moved slightly toward the girl.

"You're a mad man!" cried Norman Trent in horror. "Think what you're doing. Why should this girl have to die? Why should she have to go with you, if you're an object of sheer horror to her? Have you a single human impulse?"

"The impulse of vengeance is human," said the Black Parson. "I confess it is my most human weakness."

There was a note of sudden fierceness in his quiet voice, and one of the revolvers swung very slowly toward Norman.

Eben Hoskins, the young deputy and a simple fellow, did a simple thing. It was the thing that all so-called bad men secretly, vaguely fear, and always expect to meet soon or late.

The Black Parson was serenely confident of his hypnotic power over the company. The men stood before him, humbly obedient, held in thrall by abject fear, and by the mysterious power of his low voice and the majesty of his bearing.

Thus he had held trainloads of men and women speechless and obedient to his will. Thus he had faced superior numbers of strong men of blood and iron, well armed, and conquered them and slain them, alone.

But it is the weakness of persons of abnormal or highly complex mentality that they reckon least of all with the simple souls of the earth.

A simple thought filtered into Eben Hoskins's indolent mind and his brain cells carried the resulting impulse through the nerves to the waiting muscles.

Eben dropped his arms and stooped to the floor with unwonted swiftness, and he snatched up his abandoned rifle and pulled the trigger. It was a miracle of co-ordination and lightning speed.

A bullet sped from the rifle and penetrated the mask, the skull, and the brain of the Black Parson.

He stood still for a moment, scarcely flinching, apparently as erect and debonair as before. Then the two bright guns dropped from his hands, and the slim figure swayed forward and fell almost rigid, at full length on the floor.

Althea sprang from her chair, uttered a piercing shriek, and fell in a swoon.

Sheriff Kemp leaped like an eager hound upon the fallen foe. He tore the black mask, now wet with blood, from the head, and revealed silvery white locks. He turned the body over, exposing the face.

"Great God!" he cried out in an awful voice. "It's Blind Bill—the blind man—the girl's father—he was blind! How—"

A crash of rending timbers came from below, and a fresh burst of ribald, savage shouts and cheers. A fusillade of rifle and pistol shots proclaimed a battle in the lower room.

Like lightning Seth Corwin stripped the manacles from the wrists of Norman and Ronald.

"Quick! The roof!" he cried.

Norman shook out his aching cramped arms, then sprang across the room and caught up the senseless girl.

Ronald snatched up the two long-barreled revolvers, and he shuddered as he did it, and looked at them with loathing.

"Here," he cried to Norman, "you take one. Now run to the roof. He said there were horses waiting. Take her over the roofs—find the horses! You can make it. I'll be along. Don't mind me!"

Norman's muscles were stiff from his confinement, but Corwin and Hoskins boosted him up the ladder in the hall and through the skylight, following after him with the other men.

The moon had not risen, and the bright light from the bonfire in the street served to throw the flat roofs into deep shadow.

Norman heard a burst of shots behind him and sensed that his com-

panions had stopped to check the rioters in a dash for the roof after the fugitives.

He did not pause, but took a six-foot leap down to the roof of Mose Dudley's gambling palace, with Althea in his arms.

The next roof was higher and involved climbing, but he swung the girl up to the coping and lodged her there, then drew himself up beside her.

Six roofs were crossed, and there was no interference. Then he came to a black chasm. There was an alley running between the buildings, and he could not leap it with the inert form in his arms.

The firing continued at intervals, and there was no pursuit, but time was precious. He hung over the edge of the roof and lowered Althea by her arms, then let her go, and quickly jumped after her.

They fell in sand, and he brushed the alkali from his eyes, resumed his burden, and hurried through the dark alley toward the rear.

Blundering, stumbling over unseen rocks and clumps of cactus, he followed the rough trail at the rear of the buildings till he came to the end of the row, and crept warily along the side of a house toward the street.

There, in the flickering light from the fire up the street, he saw two horses, and a man was holding their bridles.

He stepped forward with the long-barreled gun advanced.

"Hands up!" he cried sharply.

The man cried out in fright and clapped a hand to his belt, and Norman fired pointblank and dropped him.

The horses shied skittishly, tossing their heads, and one wheeled and went galloping off.

It was a terrible moment. He let Althea fall, leaped wildly for the remaining horse and caught a stirrup leather. The animal struck and kicked at him, but he kept his hold and seized a flying rein.

The horse gave in and became almost docile, he lifted the girl to the withers, balanced her there, and got into the saddle. Knowing what he might expect, he clung to the high pommel like a drowning man to a raft, and gathered Althea within his arms.

The horse bucked, on principle, but not violently, yet it shook the rider and dazed him. There was another jump, less severe, and the beast found that the two persons still remained. It gave up in disgust and started off at a lope.

Norman settled himself and his burden, placing the slim form across the saddle in front of him and supporting her with his left arm. He found a quirt hanging from the pommel and struck the horse smartly.

It broke into a gallop, and they went down the dark road through the hills—the road by which they had entered Split Cañon in a buckboard on the day of Norman's first adventure in the great wild West.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HERITAGE OF HATE.

ON they rode into the night, the darkness closing in around them like a cloak to shield them from any possible pursuers. Behind them sporadic outbursts of shots and yells told that some of the little band who had been barricaded in the jail must still be alive, while a great glow in the sky marked the spot where the Spindell mine was burning fiercely.

The girl in Norman's arms was limp and inert. There was a look of helplessness in the blurred outlines of her face, and he gathered her closer to his breast as a wave of protective feeling surged through him. Not knowing when their escape might be discovered he pressed on, spurring their horse from time to time as that animal showed signs of growing weariness under its double burden.

Toward morning Norman discovered that Althea had opened her eyes. But she made no effort to change her position and the ride continued in silence. A few hours after the sun had risen, however, he was forced to stop. Their horse was so exhausted that it could not go any farther, and the girl's face and weary attitude showed only too plainly the effects of the terrible ordeal through which she had passed.

Looking about him, he turned down an arroyo and made their camp in a spot where they would be sheltered from the sun. Fortunately, the mad highwayman had equipped the horse for a journey, and there were substantial provisions in the saddlebags, of the army style, and a canteen of water.

Althea looked on listlessly while Norman set about preparing some food. She seemed to have lost all interest in her surroundings and to be resigned to whatever might happen to her. It was not until he had forced her to eat something, that she revived a little, and broke her silence.

"You must have known my father," she said reflectively, looking at Norman with lack-luster eyes, and with the detachment, the indifference of one no longer in, or of, the world. "If you're Simon Trent's son, you must have met, or seen my father. His name wasn't Evans, any more than it was Black Parson.

"He was Owen Prentice."

"Owen Prentice!" cried Norman aghast. "No! Not the Owen Prentice of—but yes, he was. Jet black hair—yes, I remember the deep-set eyes, the long, straight nose, the thin lips and sensitive chin. I saw him in my father's office, I've seen him in clubs and restaurants—Savarin's, the Hoffman House, Delmonico's. He was—"

"A high roller!" she exclaimed bitterly, with the strange look of maturity and even age that belied her years. "He was well known at Saratoga and Long Branch in their seasons. He drove tandem and four-in-hand in Central Park,

and bought and sold horses at Tattersall's. He was everywhere."

"My dear child," exclaimed the young man, in an excess of embarrassment, but with deep compassion, "we're of the Montagues and Capulets, you and I, but it's not our fault, is it? Yet you couldn't think well of the Trents, I suppose. It wouldn't be natural."

"What difference does it make?" she demanded with as much spirit as she could muster in her weary mind. "There's certainly nothing of the *Juliet* in me, Mr. Trent. You are kind, to take care of me like this, but—spare me anything that's romantic!"

"You really shouldn't talk, after such a mental shock," he said gravely. "But you've astonished me. We thought—everybody thought that Owen Prentice must be dead. It wasn't like him to disappear for good and all, and when he failed to reappear, there was only one opinion about it."

"We were alone in the world, you know, my father and I," the girl replied. "I was very small when my mother died. When he disappeared from New York I was with him for awhile. He was wonderful and generous and kind, to a child.

"Then there was a long time that I never knew where he was. He left me in a boarding-school in Louisiana, and I knew only that he sent money to the school sometimes.

"He was a gambler on the Mississippi steamers," she went on, with a return to the frigid abstraction. "And he drank furiously, and learned to use drugs when drink was not enough.

"He was fond of me, and he took me from the school one day and brought me out here. He was prospecting for gold, and we were in Arizona, and Colorado, and California at various times. I discovered very soon that we had no money. He had lost everything.

"I don't know when his hair turned white. I didn't know him, at first,

when he came to the school to get me. He must have had terrible experiences. When his hair turned white, there must have been other awful changes in him.

"I was too young to recognize insanity, but he talked so much to me about wealth and power. He was going to return to New York and stagger society with his magnificence. He was going to crush the men that crushed him, and make them grovel at his feet and beg for mercy.

"All that, you know, when we were hungry, and had no home. That must have been insanity."

"Insanity has so many degrees, so many phases," said Norman. "Surely it was an abnormal mind that conceived and created the Black Parson. But there was cleverness in it—almost genius, I should say. How did you remain sane, living such a life?"

"I never saw the Black Parson till last night," she told him, to his amazement. "I *did* know that he wasn't blind, and one other person knew it. Sam Lane discovered it by accident, and that's why I was made to marry him."

"Then your father *was* a beast!" cried Norman angrily.

"I was supposed to sacrifice myself to the great purpose he worked for," she explained. "Blindness was a great disguise, and he wished to be unnoticed and generally despised until he could rise and dominate the world.

"He practiced blindness, and drugs made his eyes look strange and blind. He made me flash lights before his eyes unexpectedly, and strike at him with sticks when he was not on his guard. He schooled himself to show no reaction, and often fell over obstructions in the street to acquire the natural manner of a blind man.

"When he walked almost into the fire last night, he was merely convincing any possible doubter that he was stone blind.

"Sam Lane caught him, when he thought he was alone; he saw him using

his eyes. Sam was a contemptible fellow, and he would have betrayed him on general principles. My father could not bear the thought of exposure, after so much heroic labor, and I was the bribe for Sam Lane's silence."

"You never saw the Parson!" murmured Norman wonderingly.

"Until last night. I didn't recognize him for a moment, but his voice—it was disguised, too, but not from me. When I knew that the terrible highwayman was my father, I—I think I died.

"He must have kept the clothes and the guns in some hiding place on the mountain back of the town. He was often absent from home. But he had the shop at the mill, and he was always walking long distances in the hills—to think and study, he told me.

"Prospecting brought him nothing," she said more bitterly, thinking out loud. "So you see he took up prospecting for other men's gold. He was piling up his Monte Cristo fortune by robbery, and he told me not long ago that we should soon enter New York in triumph, like the Roman conquerors when they returned to Rome."

In the afternoon Norman proposed to take up the march again, hoping to find some lodging for the second night in the wilderness, and she acquiesced with weary indifference.

"It doesn't matter," she sighed. "I'm not affected by heat or cold, I'm never hungry, and it makes no difference whether I die in the desert or some other place."

"You are too young to say such things!" he protested. "Your poor father is gone, fortunately for him and for you. You are free for the first time in your life, and you ought to welcome your freedom and make the best of it."

She laughed cynically and fell silent, making him feel strangely young and unsophisticated beside her, though she was his junior by half a decade.

She was experienced in all the rough makeshifts of the West, and when they set out again, she rode back of him,

sitting astride on a blanket that he fastened between the saddlebags.

He found a trail and followed it into the wooded hills, with little more idea of route or destination than he had when adventuring with Ronald.

"At any rate," he said, affecting a cheerful optimism, "we're in unsettled country and it's not likely that we'll be traced and pursued."

"That doesn't matter, either," she remarked, apparently determined to remain obdurate. "Nothing matters. But I'll never be taken again. If we are caught, by the sheriff or by cowboys, I know what to do. I have one of the sharp knives from the kit in the saddlebag, here in my jacket, and I shall keep it there."

"Don't!" he said sharply, impatiently.

"Death is better than most things in life," she assured him. "If it had come to me ten years ago, I should have been lucky. I should have escaped a living hell that no place of torture in the hereafter could ever surpass."

In the afternoon they crossed a ridge and descended into a fertile valley. Smoke was ascending from a chimney on a log house, and Norman regarded the place curiously as they drew nearer.

There was a truck garden under irrigation near the house, a good-sized barn with a corral, and some white beehives.

"We will stop here," he said cheerfully. "I'm not sure of a warm welcome, but I shall feel perfectly at home."

"You know the place?"

"Oh, very well. The most hospitable house I've ever been a guest in. But I'm not acquainted with the hostess or the host."

He was enjoying the little joke, but she asked no more questions, and her utter want of interest silenced him.

He turned the horse into the yard, and the woman in the great sunbonnet came out to greet them.

"Howdy," she exclaimed in a dry, friendly manner, vastly different from that of the evening of the first visit. "You young folks on your honeymoon, I reckon?"

"No," said Althea sourly, "we're not. We're not related, and scarcely know each other."

The speech was not so much for the woman's information, as to put Norman in his place.

"'Tain't very proper, then," said the woman sternly, "for a couple to be travelin' as you are. But it's none o' my affairs, I s'pose. You want something to eat, I s'pose."

"That's it," answered Norman. "And, while this lady probably won't admit it, she's very tired and has been ill. She ought to rest up for awhile. The man of the house at home?"

"No, he ain't. Went off last night to Split Cañon, an' for no good purpose. Reckon he must 'a' got all lickered up, and he's most likely in the calaboose over there now."

"I hope he's as well off as that," said the young man. "There was a pretty bad time at Split Cañon last night. An explosion at the mine—you must have heard it even out here—and a fight that took in most of the living creatures in the place. I hope your husband came out of it without serious harm."

"That's his look-out, if he will go gallivantin' like that. But it's hard on me to do all the chores, while he spends the money."

"We came away from Split Cañon," said Norman, as he dismounted and took Althea down from her perch, "because it was no safe place for a lady to remain in. It was much less proper to remain there, than to travel in the manner that you object to, madam."

"Have to expect most anything out here," droned the farm woman, "and you can't look for much decency in anything or anybody. For all that, if this young gal ain't goin' back there, an' wants somethin' to do, I need a handy gal to help around the place."

"All right," said Althea quickly, "I'll take the job. I can work as well as any one."

The woman was pleased.

"Tie up your nag," she said, "while I go'n' put the kettle on. We'll have a cup o' tea and talk it over."

"You can't stay here," said Norman, as the woman left them.

"And why not?"

"I'm not willing to leave you here. If you persist, I shall stay, too."

She stared at him with marked disfavor.

"Another rush of romance to the head?" she demanded harshly. "Are you one of the men that can't look at a girl without getting sentimental and idiotic? I really did think better of you. I'm not a *Juliet*, I tell you, and I don't care for *Romeos*."

"You don't exactly inspire anything like tender sentiment," he retorted rudely. "I'm not making love to you, Althea, but I'm not going to leave you. In spite of you, and all your hardness, I'm going to see you settled in some good and pleasant place. You've got to have your chance to live a normal life and become a normal woman, no matter how much you object to being decent."

"You're interested in me, you see, Mr. Trent, and that's because you pity me. I don't want to be pitied, thank you. I don't pity myself, for that matter."

"I loathe myself, and I loathe you. Why shouldn't I hate the son of Simon Trent?"

"Because the son of Simon Trent doesn't hate the daughter of Owen Prentice, for one reason," returned the man. "My father was never an enemy of your father, Althea. They were partners, and my father gave Owen every chance in the world to make a success and a fortune."

"Your father was a spendthrift and a wastrel. He went from indolence to petty dishonesty, and so, on to embezzlement and theft. My father re-

fused to have him arrested, but banished him from New York. So he hated my father with the bitterest kind of hatred—that of the unworthy man for the just man whom he has wronged.

"I should spare you these things, I suppose, but—"

"That wouldn't be natural," she said with grim irony. "A woman never is spared anything by a man—in suffering and hardship and unkindness."

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed, contritely. "But you drove me to it, and I spoke in justice to my father, who is a good man."

The farm woman called them to the house, and Norman put the horse in the corral.

"Sit right down," said the hostess. "The gal might as well make herself right to home, if she's goin' to stay here."

"She's not going to stay," declared Norman harshly.

"I *am* going to stay," cried the girl angrily.

"What you got to say about it, young man?" demanded the woman belligerently.

"She *can't* stay, because she's under arrest in this county as a suspicious person, and as a material witness in a murder case. She's a fugitive from justice at this moment."

The woman screamed and dropped her earthen teapot with a crash.

"Murder!" she cried. "What murder case? Who's murdered, for mercy's sake? Who's the murderer?"

The young man rose from the table and glared at her fearfully.

"I am the murderer!" he declared in an awful voice. "She is the chief witness in the case, and if she doesn't go to court I may be hanged by the neck. I'm a murderer, madam, and a thief, and there are sheriffs and marshals on my trail at this moment."

The terrified woman stared at him in fearful fascination. She let her

eyes rove over him from head to foot, noting the marks and signs of a murderer.

Suddenly she came to herself with a start. She glared at him with courage born of indignation, and stretched out a bony hand to point the finger of scorn at him.

"Look a' them pants!" she cried. "My man's pants! Real broadcloth, an' there ain't none like it in New Mexico."

"Do you believe me now?" he asked. "I stole these pants from this very house, and a lot of other things, but I didn't murder any one here *that* time. However—"

The woman shrieked, as she shrieked before, and ran out the door and down the hillside, catching up her boy from his play in the yard and dragging him after her.

"Do you care to stay here now, Althea?" Norman asked quietly, picking up his cup and adding a spoonful of sugar to the tea.

"No," she said wearily, getting up from the chair. "But it doesn't matter. I'll move on again, to the next place. I hate you a little more now, if that's possible, and you may be pleased to know it.

"My father had—they called it an extravagant sense of humor, among his friends. Perhaps that's why my mother died so soon."

"Drink your tea!" he commanded, "while I get the horse. If you won't play 'Romeo and Juliet,' we'll play 'The Taming of the Shrew,' and you're the very person for the rôle."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRIBUNAL.

WITH Althea coldly indifferent to her fate, the strange and picturesque pair rode into Santa Fe on the morning of the day set for Norman's trial. They rode slowly down the Camino del Rosario, through

the plaza of the Governor's palace, and around the town until they found the courthouse.

People stared at them and smiled good-humoredly, believing that they were simple rustics, riding into the city to be married.

Norman surrendered to a marshal, who had a record of the case, and presented Althea as a witness.

An hour later, Sheriff Kemp rode into town, accompanied by Ronald Ingram-Browne, and two deputies.

"Browne said you'd be here, if you were alive," remarked the sheriff, as he stared half incredulously at Norman. "I came anyhow, to put him on trial and have it over. I've got Hugo Bebb's deposition, and I guess it's pretty generally believed now that the Parson held up the coach, instead of you and Browne doing it.

"You'll be tried mostly for shooting Tim Sharpe, and for what you did in the fight in the adobe. We ought to have Rance Buxton's boys here for witnesses, but most of 'em are locked up in the county jail."

While they waited the pleasure of the court officials, Norman learned that Ronald had remained with the defenders of the jail. There had been a desperate battle in the dark, over the roofs, up and down stairs and ladders, and through the streets. Rance Buxton was dangerously wounded by his own men, and two of the RX boys were killed.

The town was neither sacked nor burned to ashes. The efficient Henry Spindell had extinguished his own private fire, then led his loyal miners and mill hands to the relief of Split Cañon.

The miners were sober, and they subdued the drunken rioters and chastised them as severely as their commander would permit.

Norman inquired about the disposition of Owen Prentice's body, out of Althea's hearing.

"Spindell took charge of it," said

Ronald. "It was the Parson, they learned, who blew up the mine. Most of the mischief of the night was traced to him, but Spindell had the body embalmed and sent to New York for burial.

"It seems that Spindell knew him there, and thought he ought to be buried in the family plot.

"I say," he added, "that Spindell is a good sort. He said that the Parson used to be—er—yes, Owen Prentice, in New York, but something went all wrong."

The case was called near noon, and the trial opened in an informal manner in the small court room.

A young lawyer was assigned by the judge to represent the accused, and the prosecuting attorney presented the evidence furnished by Sheriff Kemp.

The jury was made up of men accustomed to frontier disorder and cases in which the defendants figured somewhat heroically, and they looked upon Norman Trent without disfavor. But they were astounded when Althea Lane was called to the witness box, not only by her evident youth and her delicate beauty, but even more by her cold self-possession.

Norman's attorney had entered a plea of guilty to the charge of manslaughter, and proposed to demonstrate that it was justifiable.

Althea simply corroborated Norman's admission that he shot and killed Tim Sharpe, and the prosecutor asked her to describe the incident.

She told of the chase along the railroad line and her efforts to elude the drunken cowboy. Then she related coldly, unemotionally, how Trent and Ingram-Browne had leaped from the train and rushed to her aid. Sharpe had attempted Trent's life without due provocation, and Trent shot him in self defense.

The prosecutor requested information as to the previous events leading to the race between buckboard and horseman. He understood, he said

blandly, that there had been other tragically serious aspects to the episode.

At a whispered request from Trent, his attorney entered an objection. The question was irrelevant.

The court overruled the objection. The court plainly desired to hear all of the harrowing details.

Althea's pale face became, if anything, more composed.

"I was forced to marry Lane," she said, looking at the judge, "by my father, because Lane could have sent him to the gallows at a word. I was married to Lane in the old church at Bitter Springs, and all of the men there except the minister were drunk.

"I intended to kill myself after the wedding, if there was an opportunity, but I was rushed away in a buckboard at once. We were going back to Split Cañon.

"Lane's friends rode after the buckboard in the usual way at such weddings, but they were so drunk and so violent that Sam Lane lost his temper, and he stopped the horses out in the prairie.

"I thought there was going to be shooting, and I was scared. But I didn't care whether I was killed or not. Some of the men had turned back to the Springs, but Bull Varick and Tim Sharpe and Colorado Quinn were there. They quarreled violently, and got to shooting, and Quinn and Bull Varick were killed. I couldn't say whether Sam Lane or Tim Sharpe killed them."

Norman fidgeted and glanced at Ronald. She was giving an altered version of the story.

"Sharpe got the drop on Sam Lane," she continued, "and said he didn't want to kill an old pal. Sam proposed to shake dice for me. He said that Sharpe could have me if he won."

There was a flutter of excitement in the jury box and some suppressed exclamations.

"Sam got down from the buckboard, and they took Tim's dice and

sat down on the ground. Tim won, and they shook hands and drank out of a bottle. Sam told Tim to get in the buckboard, and he would take Tim's horse.

"There was a revolver under the seat, and I took it up and shot Sam Lane—shot him through the head."

"Althea!" cried Norman, white with horror.

She glanced at him and looked again at the judge.

"I never told all this before," she said simply, "but my father is dead, and it doesn't matter with me. I killed Sam Lane, and he deserved it. I aimed the gun at Tim, and he ran and got on his horse. Then I whipped the ponies and drove off. Tim came after me, and I fired back at him and hit his horse.

"I think he'd have killed me, if he had caught me, but Mr. Trent and Mr. Browne stopped him. That's all there is to the story."

Discussion broke out in the court room, and the trial was suspended tactily.

"I didn't know—I never guessed this woman had committed murder," said Sheriff Kemp, "though she was held as a suspicious character."

"It isn't the opinion of this court," said the elderly judge, "that she *did* commit murder. The court would say that she acted in defense of the sanctity of American womanhood."

The members of the jury clapped their hands in spontaneous approval, and the judge frowned slightly and tapped the bench with his gavel.

"If counsel have no further questions bearing on the case," he said, "this witness is excused, and is free to leave this court when she pleases."

Ronald went to the stand and told his story of the shooting of Sharpe. There was no further testimony available, and the attorneys summed up briefly.

The judge issued terse instructions to the jury, but the foreman rose to re-

port that the jury had arrived at a verdict without leaving the room. The accused was innocent of the charges as read, and the jury unanimously agreed.

The prosecutor and Sheriff Kemp conferred in private, and a motion was made that the charges against Norman Trent and Ronald Browne in the case of the shooting of the stagecoach driver and guard be dismissed. The judge was pleased to grant the motion.

Norman and Ronald were then charged with complicity in the murder of certain men in a sanguinary encounter in a certain adobe hut owned by a Mexican farmer. Sheriff Kemp requested that counsel for the defense be allowed to read the sworn deposition of Marshal Hugo Bebb of Split Cañon.

The document was produced and read, to the greater glory of the defendants.

The formal statement of the bed-ridden marshal praised the conduct of the accused. It related that the marshal had held the two men as his prisoners until an imminent fight of grave proportions caused him to release them and swear them into his service as deputy marshals.

Subsequent to that official act, the said prisoners rendered faithful and gallant service as officers of the law, and the marshal ventured to state that he owed his life to them, in that they had put out of action certain of the most desperate characters in the hostile faction, who might otherwise have put him to death, whereas he escaped with serious wounds.

The prosecutor was pleased to move that the charges as originally drawn be dismissed, and the court concurred.

There were no other charges, and the judge adjourned court. He descended from the bench and congratulated the young men upon their acquittal.

He was familiar with the name of Trent, and gratified to know that Norman was the son of that member of the

family most widely known and respected in New Mexico.

He regretted, however, that Norman's high connection in New York might make it difficult for him to be persuaded to adopt New Mexico as his home. He ventured the hope that Mr. Ingram-Browne might think favorably of the territory.

"It's really a jolly old place," said Ronald graciously. "And it's never dull out here, you know."

Althea had slipped quietly from the room when the last of the charges was dismissed. As soon as he could decently take leave of the judge, Norman hurried after her.

He saw her walking swiftly toward the plaza, and, by running, he overtook her there.

She turned indignantly and faced him.

"Why don't you go away now?" she demanded. "You're free. Go back to New York, where you belong."

"Where are you going?" he asked. "What are you going to do? You have no money, and no friends in Santa Fe."

"I never had any friends," she said. "I shall stay here, I think. I can get some work to do, somewhere."

"Why, then, I shall stay," he announced calmly. "I prefer New York, but you will need me. Not want me, of course, but need me. I make that distinction in deference to your feelings."

She sat down weakly on a bench.

"Is it sport for you?" she groaned. "It's persecution, you know. You mock me, and I almost believe it's a spirit of cruelty. I want to be alone, and I hope I shall never see your face again."

"If you want to know," she went on angrily, "you were the chief cause of the confession that I made. I hoped to be tried for murder and convicted, but I'm always disappointed."

"I wanted you to know before you

went away from here that I had committed murder.

"That changes things, doesn't it? A man can kill, and still be manly. He can be honored for it, as you were in the court. The judge was very kind and generous to me. But the world is never that. A woman cannot kill, and remain anything but an outcast and an object of aversion to every one."

"It's like you—you are a gentleman, Mr. Trent. It's like you to spare my feelings about the—the murder, but you needn't have come out here to speak to me again. Please go away. Don't say any more."

Norman smiled sadly and shook his head. He took her hands firmly in his. She struggled to free them, but he wouldn't let them go.

"You loved your father, didn't you, Althea?" he asked softly. "You stuck to him through thick and thin, knowing him for a pitiful charlatan, and later for a dangerous criminal."

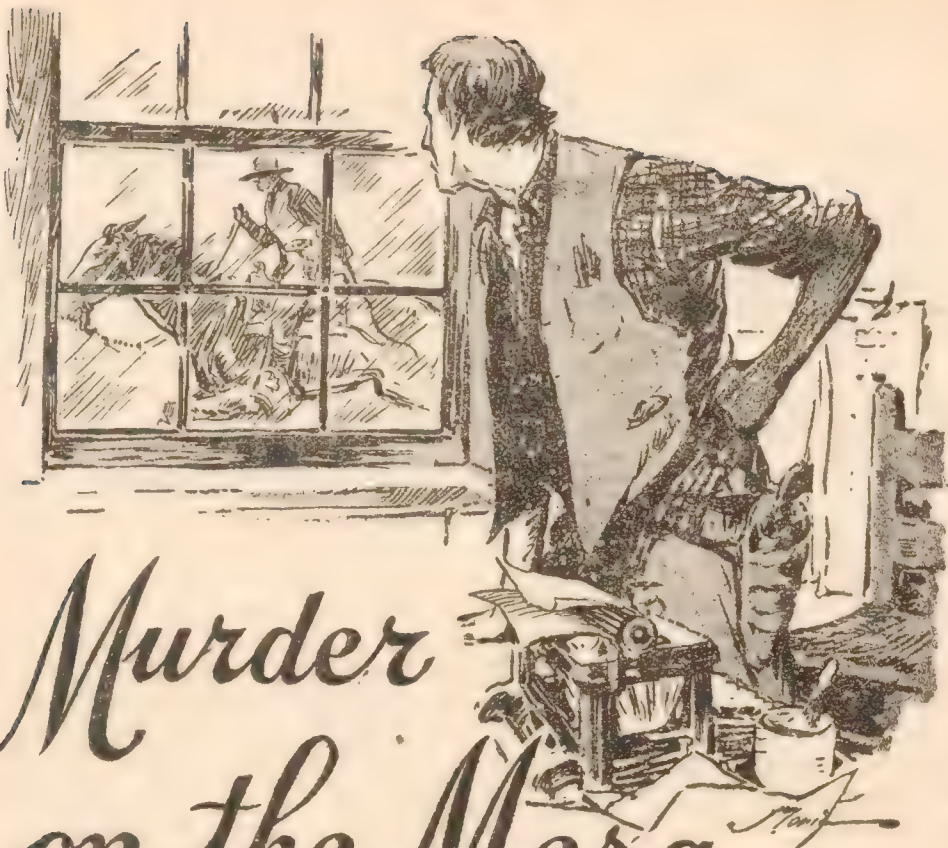
"He was kind to me, at times," she said abstractedly. "In his better moments, he was often tender and affectionate."

"We forgive those we love," he said. "I forgive you for hating me, and for all the unkind things you have said to me. If you are a self-confessed murderess, I forgive you and thank God that you did the deed. I wouldn't have it undone."

"Come with me to New York and we'll see if New York will accept and take to its heart a pair of lovers with such desperate crimes behind them."

"If it won't, we still have each other. We'll come back to New Mexico, where even the judges honor and admire a conscientious murderer."

Althea was crying, and he wondered if it were the first time she had ever shed tears. Her stiff little frame relaxed and sank wearily toward him, as he sat down beside her, and he knew that such weakening on her part was unconditional surrender.



Murder on the Mesa

By HARRY E. MACPHERSON

How it came that neither the sheriff nor his deputy solved a murder mystery yet captured the reward nevertheless

THE monotony of life in Mesa Grande, sleepy little cow town, county seat of Rodeo County, had been shattered on Monday night when young Danny Skinner, only son of beloved old Dad Skinner, owner of the Circle J, had run amuck. Danny, victim of a head injury from a fall in the last round-up, had rather thoroughly shot up the town.

Although the frenzied boy, cold sober, but suffering from some mental delusion, had killed no one—chiefly because his aim was bad—it would have

made an excellent news story for the front page of the *Weekly Mesa Grande Tidings*.

The youth had been disarmed and subdued after a flurry of extraordinary excitement; had been taken home to the ranch and put in care of his father; Dad Skinner had paid damages to one and all for broken glass and shattered furniture and fixtures. Danny, sadly admitted by all as loco, was a prisoner in his own home.

Any other newspaper editor, especially in a week when items of interest

were few and far between, would probably have printed some kind of a yarn about the affair. It was news. Yet it was characteristic of "Jingling" Jessup, lanky big owner-editor of the four-page weekly, that his Saturday night issue appeared without one reference to young Skinner's dangerous slip from sanity.

"Poor kid—he even cursed his old dad when they took him home," commented Jingling Jessup as he talked the matter over with his sole assistant, a tramp printer and pressman who set up type and ran the little flat-bed press.

"Yep," agreed the printer. But he added: "There ain't much other news."

"No," agreed Jessup, half serious, half joking, "but I'd rather lose my entire list of paid subscribers—all six of them—rather than to add to old Dad Skinner's grief. He's one fine old hombre!"

Thus the weekly edition, containing nothing more interesting than a few padded-up personals, gossip of the cattle business, and some verse written by Jingling Jessup to fill space, was off the press.

The Mexican boy, on his burro, was making the local deliveries. The mail copies had been posted. Week's pay in his pocket—a check which left his employer practically broke—the tramp printer, thirsty for the nearest bar, was hurriedly scouring the ink from his hands.

Jingling Jessup, with a last grimacing look at the unexciting current copy of the *Tidings*, lowered his booted feet from the spur-scratched desk. Jestingly, with the ease born of many hours spent in making jingles, he spoke in rime:

"Oh, for a fight, be it killing or booze,
That I might write, thus spilling the
news."

The spluttering printer looked up from the flowing spigot with a grin at

his big employer, but the latter's lean bronze face was serious as he walked toward the window which looked out on Mesa Grande's false-fronted business district. Presently, still musing rimed thoughts, he expressed a genuine premonition.

For his knowledge of the law of compensation had created the intuitive certainty that after a long spell of nothing-doing there was bound to be a series of readable events.

"I have a hunch," he orated, "so to speak—that of news there'll be a bunch this very week. And that, my lad, is what we poets would term practically a perfect quatrain, alternately rimed."

The printer, hurrying out, again grinned a "Yep, that's right" and left the office. As he did so, arrival of a hurrying horseman was indicated by the noise of rapidly approaching hoofs.

Jingling Jessup peered more closely through the unwashed window, his interest typical of the news seeker. Every arrival in town usually meant a news item.

He saw a big bay horse, lathered as though from a long and pitiless pace, gallop past. Riding him was a somewhat small man whose silvered sombrero and silvered harness trappings flashed in the sun.

Jessup said aloud: "Oh, it's Hargrove," and watched down the street. A puzzled frown crossed his face as he saw the rider pull up in front of the county jail, dismount, and hurry in.

Hargrove, owner of the small Bar T adjoining Dad Skinner's Circle J over Coyote Cañon way, was one of Dad Skinner's best friends, Jessup knew, and the troubling thought occurred to him that Hargrove had brought bad news. Possibly young Skinner had got loose and was on another gun rampage.

Yet he was not greatly disturbed. He remembered that Hargrove, unlike most ranchers, had little consideration for a horse.

"Probably just galloped all the way to pass the time of day," the editor said.

Guns flapping on either hip—for Jingling Jessup was a straight-shooting person able to make a pair of forty-fives rime when occasion required—he walked back to his desk, busied himself with pastepot and shears.

Jessup's best friend, Sheriff Del Lewis, had just left for Alkali Flats, over to the southeast, on the trail of cattle rustlers. He had left his deputy, Hank Style, in charge.

The big editor, his mind cutting back gloomily to the misfortune of young Danny Skinner, almost absently took a piece of paper and inserted it in an ancient writing machine.

"Sheriff Lewis has departed over Alkali Flats way," he wrote. "It's our opinion that those rustlers will have to be hustlers and run like—if they get away from Del. Hank Style, chief deputy, is acting as sheriff pro tempore."

Jingling Jessup was smiling at his own sly fun—picturing mentally the many inquiries of "What the tarnation does that there pro tempore mean?"—when hurrying boots creaked on the porch boards, the door was flung open, and a fat, red-faced man with a huge star on his shirt, burst in.

"Hello, Hank!" Jessup said slowly, turning in his chair, an easy smile on his face. "I was just making you famous. Doing my stint, by putting you into print, as it were."

Deputy Hank Style's little eyes, seemingly smaller because of his plump red face, fairly popped excitement. He was panting so hard that he could hardly get his breath to speak.

Jessup shoved a chair behind him, and gently pushed him into it.

"It must be at least a murder," the editor said.

The deputy leaped up.

"Good cripes, Jingling," he gasped, "how did yuh guess it?"

"And over in the Coyote Cañon district?"

The deputy's large mouth dropped open in astonishment.

"Yeah, Jingling, but who told yuh about it?"

"Nobody," answered Jessup mysteriously.

He enjoyed using his native sense of deduction, especially with Hank Style. Hank, when the sheriff was away, was always inclined to be just a little bit cocky.

"Wait a minute, Jingling," demanded Style. "This here ain't no matter for triflin'. It's plumb serious. If yuh know anything, I want to know where yuh learned it."

So saying, the deputy pounded the table, but pounded it too hard, and his plump fist, bruised, involuntarily went to his mouth.

Jingling Jessup repressed a smile. He saw that Style was terribly in earnest.

"Don't get irate, Hank," Jessup explained. "I was just guessing at the murder part. Figured it would take at least that to make you run all the way here from the office. And I saw Cass Hargrove from Coyote Cañon come riding in hell-bent about five shakes ago and stop in at your office. I just put two and two together. Now come clean—spill the news. Lord knows I need it. I only hope it wasn't some sheepherder that killed another one. That wouldn't make such a good yarn."

"Good cripes, Jingling," protested Style. "Don't joke. Somebody's killed Dad Skinner!"

"Dad Skinner!"

Jingling Jessup's exclamation was one of mingled horror and grief. All vestige of jesting evaporated.

He leaped to his feet. His usual slow drawl disappeared as he barked questions at the deputy.

"When did it happen—and how? Do they know who did it?"

"Happened some time last night," Hank Style answered. "Hargrove just come in with the news. But that ain't the worst."

"Not the worst!" Jessup exclaimed.

"No," replied Style. He fiddled with his hat and looked away. "The kid—young Danny—broke out of the room where he was locked up. He's gone. And the old man had a forty-five bullet through his head."

II.

HAD Sheriff Lewis been in town he would have insisted that Jingling Jessup go direct to the Circle J ranch and help him investigate the killing of the popular old rancher. For Jessup, though concealing much of his ability beneath a veneer of nonsensical rime and verbal patter, had often aided the sheriff in the solution of mysteries.

What Jessup had been before he came to the Mesa Grande country many years before in search of health was unknown. They did know, however, that he knew how to use a gun—and use two of them—well.

Some said he must have been a detective. All agreed that he "shore was smart at figgerin' things out."

None knew Jingling Jessup's peculiar ability along this line better than did Deputy Hank Style. Hank knew, too, that the tall editor never took any credit away from the sheriff or his deputies; that the stories he wrote up for the *Tidings* always gave the officers full glory, never mentioned the part that Jingling had played.

Hank himself had guessed mighty wrong in several cases. In all these, Jessup had been right. He knew that the sheriff knew this.

Hence, wishing to solve the mystery unaided, Style merely promised Jessup all the news and went to the scene of the crime with Cass Hargrove.

Jingling Jessup might have gone along if he had wished, but he saw that Hank Style didn't want him. So he remained in Mesa Grande. But he did not remain idle.

News that Dad Skinner had been killed—that Danny was under suspi-

cion—was more than mere news to Jessup. It was a personal tragedy.

In the first place, old Dad Skinner had been his friend, as he was the friend of 'most every one thereabouts. He had helped Jingling Jessup financially when the little weekly was threatened with a stampede of debts.

And the boy—well, Jingling had known Danny before the lad had received his head injury; had known him to be a clean, likable youngster with no more streak of brutality or viciousness in him than was in his old father.

Excitement, of course, ran high when the news got about. Many from the town rushed out to the ranch. Several were curious that Jessup didn't start for the scene.

"Seems tuh me that a scribe that's been achin' fer news would be Johnny on the spot," was the way one cow-puncher put it, as he invited Jessup to saddle up and go with him.

"No," Jessup answered easily. "I'll get all the news just as soon as you jaspers get back. Especially Hank. And this paper's a weekly, not a daily. I got work to do."

Jingling Jessup's analytical mind, aided by an all-retaining memory, began functioning toward a solution immediately, even before he knew the details.

The immediate and saddening conclusion, of course, was that Dad Skinner's insane son had slain his father in a fit of madness. Without dismissing such a possibility, he tried to remember whether the kindly old rancher had any enemies.

Pursuing this mental inquiry, the editor gave a genuine start on meeting Tex Shepherd, discharged foreman of the Skinner ranch. Tex, a victim of booze, and even then obviously suffering from the effects of an extended period of drunkenness, had been pretty violent in his threats against Dad Skinner during the terrific spree Tex had staged when the long-patient rancher had finally discharged him.

Seeing Jessup, Tex Shepherd pulled up his ill-cared-for pony—he had just ridden in from the general direction of the Circle J—and blinked at the editor through red-lidded eyes.

"Shore is too bad about Dad Skinner," he began. Jessup noted that his hands trembled violently as he rolled a cigarette. "I reckon it was that devil of a chink that did it. Chinks are bad medicine. And then they found that long pipe of his right near where the safe was robbed. Say, Jingling, can yuh loan me a dollar? I'm plumb broke, an' I shore need a jolt mighty bad."

Not without distaste for the man, but with characteristic generosity, Jingling Jessup slowly reached and handed the shaking Shepherd the asked-for amount.

"Where you been, Tex?" he inquired mildly.

"Me? Oh, jest ramblin' around over Coyote Cañon way. Was huntin' another job, but got all swacked up again. Met some waddies on the way back an' they told me 'bout the murder. Shore was tough."

"There was money taken?"

"Yeh. Two-three thousand the old man had to buy cattle with, I hear. Them chinks are shore hell after gold. Well, thanks, Jingling—I'm goin' to beat it fer that drink. I'll pay yuh back soon's I get to work."

Jingling Jessup watched Tex Shepherd as he rode up the street, hurriedly leaped from his horse, and dashed into the nearest bar. Jessup knew that many crimes are committed by drunken men who do not even remember what occurred. He wondered.

Here, he told himself, was a real mystery. A rancher shot down and killed, his money stolen, and a Chinese cook gone. That seemed simple enough. Deputy Sheriff Hank Style, he decided, would call it an open and shut case.

He tried to recall the cook on the Circle J. A mild little Celestial, he re-

membered, who had been with Dad Skinner for many years. Mild, but like most Chinese, subtle and still-mouthed. An inveterate gambler, too.

Aloud he said: "Well, where there's gold, the trail shouldn't long stay cold," and he turned his steps first to the main gambling hall. From there, after a few inquiries, he went to the town bank where he spent an hour in discussing the murder with the banker, an old friend of Dad Skinner's.

The banker, he found, was disturbed by the killing. Bankerlike, however, he seemed much excited by the theft, Jessup noted, after he had told him that the slayer had robbed the old man.

"Such a robbery causes complications in an estate," the banker explained. "Dad Skinner, though prosperous, was like most ranchers hereabouts, heavily in debt to the bank from time to time. Business is business, and I shall be forced to put in a claim against the ranch. I only trust that people in the town will not think me grasping in making such a claim."

Jingling Jessup grinned.

"Well, no matter what you do, most folks figure a banker's made out of flint," he told him. "Me—sometimes I wish I had a little harder heart. I expect I could collect money of some description for every paper subscription."

The banker, with rather a forced smile at Jessup's quaintness of comment—he privately had always considered the editor a kind of "nut"—promised Jessup that he would keep him informed.

Emerging from the bank, Jessup sensed more than heard, the buzz of fresh excitement. Some of those that had visited the scene of the murder had returned.

Groups were seen here and there. Nearing these knots, he heard their voices raised. A posse was forming.

"We'll need a rope for the damn chink," he heard some one say.

"What about young Skinner?"

somebody else asked. "He's gone, too."

"The boy never killed his paw," the other returned, certainty in his voice. "I figger the chink killed the kid, too, and hid the body."

Somebody, recognizing the tall editor, told him that Deputy Hank Style was back; that he was looking for Jingling in the *Tidings* office.

Arriving there, Jessup was surprised to find Dad Skinner's friend, Hargrove—the man who had brought the first news—had come with the deputy.

The plump deputy, small eyes popping with the importance of his news, started bursting into a narration of what had been found at the ranch. Hargrove, the rancher, listened with seeming impatience for a minute or two, then broke into Style's description of details with a hard curtness.

"Just a minute, Style," he snapped. "There's no mystery about it, except the bare possibility that young Skinner might have killed his father. The boy's crazy, and just wandered away. Find him, and you'll find he knows nothing of it."

"But it's plain the Chinaman committed the murder and the robbery. There was his pipe in the room. The money's gone. He's gone. I want, personally, to offer a thousand dollars for his apprehension. Put that in your paper, Mr. Jessup, and that means *dead or alive!*"

"What about Tex Shepherd?" inquired Jingling Jessup.

Though he understood the heat exhibited by Dad Skinner's next ranch neighbor, such a bar-other-theory conclusion in any case always irritated him a bit. That was the attitude Deputy Style always took—or even Sheriff Lewis, wise as that veteran was.

Only Jessup knew how many times they had guessed wrong. Hence, without a great deal of seriousness, he tossed in a suspicion of the discharged foreman.

"What about *him*?" Style asked.

The editor told him. Told him how Shepherd had ridden in from the direction of the ranch with all the appearance of a drunken debauch. How the discharged foreman had been the first to tell him the news of the robbery. And he reminded the deputy of Shepherd's threats after Dad Skinner had discharged him.

"Nonsense," snapped Hargrove. "The man's just a drunken fool."

"Wal," argued the deputy, "I reckon I ought to make an arrest anyhow, jest on suspicion. In the meantime, mebbe the posse will find the chink. Mebbe Danny Skinner 'll be found. I'd like to locate *him*, too."

The plump officer, assuming his air of authority which somehow always seemed comical to Jingling Jessup, looked from one to the other. Then he added:

"Yuh know, with the law, in a case like this here, it's so we have to suspect ever'body till we nab the guilty party."

Just then the door swung open. All three men leaped to their feet with surprise. With his shirt stained with blood, and his clothes ripped and torn, young Danny Skinner stumbled in.

"Oh," he exclaimed, and sank in a chair, holding his hand to the lump on the side of his head that the accident had caused, "I've got such a headache."

"Here," shouted Style, violently jerking the youth upward, "where was you, Danny, when yore paw was killed?"

The mad boy stared, blankness in his eyes. No trace of emotion.

"Where was you?" reiterated the deputy.

Danny blinked at them.

"I don't know," he answered.

III.

A WEEK later, Jingling Jessup was coming out of the bank, a trace of excitement in his usually calm eyes, when

his friend the sheriff, Del Lewis, rode into town and asked the editor to go with him direct to the sheriff's office.

Deputy Hank Style was there, and Jessup saw that the plump deputy looked like a disappointed youngster when the sheriff invited Jessup into his private office, and told Style to remain outside.

"Got back soon's I could when I heard the news," Sheriff Lewis explained. "I hear there hasn't been much done. Haven't you been a-working on it, Jingling?"

Jessup smiled slowly.

"Well, now, Del, your words make me quail. Are there not a couple of men in jail?"

"Don't joke, Jingling." The sheriff frowned. "We can't hold people jest on suspicion too long. Of course, Danny's better off in jail than riding around the country with that bunged-up head of his. And Tex Shepherd is sober for the first time in ten years. The posse couldn't find hair nor hide of the Chinaman. What do *you* think?"

"Listen, Del," answered Jessup, choosing his words carefully. "I'm leaving town to-night. I don't want anybody to trail me. Maybe I'll find that Chinaman myself. I'd like to win the reward."

"I hope you do," the sheriff told him. "And there's going to be a county reward of five hundred in addition to that thousand posted by Hargrove." He hesitated and added: "I think that was mighty generous of Hargrove, don't you?"

"He and the old man were mighty close to one another," explained Jessup. "Now mum's the word, and I'll try to do something."

Sheriff Lewis seemed a little disappointed.

"I know you like to play a lone hand, Jingling, but can't you give me a notion?"

"Not a stint of a hint," answered the editor. "But if I find what I think, I want you to get together a kind of

public informal hearing right out in the street where everybody can be in on it."

The sheriff agreed. During two full days, with no word from the editor, the sheriff watched impatiently for his return.

In the meantime the open scorn of Deputy Style, when told of Jingling Jessup's secret departure, even caused the sheriff to doubt. And on the day that Jessup got back he was just on the point of ordering another posse, at the suggestion of Hargrove, who had been in Mesa Grande several days on business, when the unhurried big editor rode in.

"Well, Jingling," commented the sheriff, "where's the Chinaman?"

"Yeah," spoke up Style, a trace of scorn in his voice.

"Maybe I have him," hinted Jessup. "Maybe he's concealed about my person somewhere."

"Still joking, I see," snapped Hargrove. "I think we ought to scatter descriptions far and wide; and let another posse try again."

"Yes?" Jingling Jessup drawled the word. "Now, sheriff, for certain reasons, I've changed my mind. This place here is handy enough for the hearing I spoke of, not out in the street. Let you and Hargrove and I stay here, while Style goes out to the jail and brings in the prisoners. I want both Danny and Tex here. Maybe we will even have to make a trip to the bank."

Both the sheriff and Hargrove were puzzled by the editor's air of mystery. But Style showed unusual speed. Presently he brought in Danny Skinner and Tex Shepherd.

Tex, traces of intoxication entirely gone, glared at them with a sullenness typical of many an accused man. Danny Skinner, though he had been made to understand that his father was dead—murdered—still wore the blank, dazed look. He recognized none of them.

With the exception of the boy, who sat near the front door, which Deputy Style had carefully locked, all gazed at Jingling Jessup with the keenest interest.

Jessup, standing near Danny, placed his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Danny here didn't do it," stated the editor. "He must have wandered away from home just before the murder. I learned that he's had frequent nosebleeds since his injury. He tore his clothes wandering around in the chaparral.

"And Tex didn't do it. Of course, I know that Tex didn't know whether he did or not. But if Tex had had any money on the morning he came into town, needing a drink as bad as he did, he'd have saved some out, even if he hid the rest."

"That leaves the Chinaman," exclaimed the sheriff.

"Exactly," snapped Jessup. "I have found the Chinaman. He is dead. He was murdered. His body was thrown over the cliff down into Rattlesnake Gorge, where no horse could ever go; where his murderer—who also murdered Dad Skinner—flung him after he had planted the cook's pipe to make the evidence more damning!"

"Wait a moment!"

The interruption came surprisingly from Hargrove; they had all been watching Jessup. Now they saw the friend of Dad Skinner half rise, his face white, but eyes blazing.

"How," his voice trembled, "can you know all this?"

"Because," answered Jingling Jessup slowly and distinctly, "I feel certain that the man who killed Dad Skinner was a man that knew him well; who knew that he had all that gold in the safe.

"I believe he's the same man that this week paid off a note at the bank which long had been due. He might even, thinking the Chinaman's body would never be found, have offered a high reward for—"

"A damn lie!" screamed Hargrove. And with the scream he drew his revolver and fired directly at Jessup.

The editor, however, had been watching him. He knew the emotions of men; knew that cornered coyotes will fight. Almost at the same moment that Hargrove fired, Jessup's own gun spoke.

Hargrove's shot, missing Jessup, struck young Skinner alongside the head. Blood gushed forth, but, with a moan of surprise, the boy stood up and stared at them.

There was no moan, though, from Hargrove. Jingling Jessup's aim had been true.

He was dead, a bullet through his head, just as old Dad Skinner had died.

IV.

EVERYTHING was serene as Jingling Jessup, busy with the work of getting out the livest newspaper that the *Mesa Grande Tidings* had ever been, hummed a little ditty. The rewards he had earned for the slayer of Dad Skinner would buy a new press.

Danny Skinner, head grazed by the murderer's self-accusing bullet, had been restored to sanity; the bullet had broken a blood clot.

Sheriff Del Lewis and his deputy, Hank Style, entered and pulled him away from his desk. Hank was meek, all cockiness gone. Sheriff Lewis still wore a puzzled look.

"Quit being mysterious, Jingling, and explain how you figured it out," demanded the sheriff.

"First," Jessup told him presently, "always look for a motive. Then look around and see who's interested. And you can some time suspect, in peace as in war, that the biggest spy is waving the flag the loudest."

"Oh, I see," mused the sheriff. "You mean Hargrove's reward offer."

"Precisely. I knew he wasn't prosperous. Then I found that he had paid off a long-due note suddenly."

"With gold?" The sheriff was amazed.

"No; he stripped his bank account to settle it. And he had planned to buy stock with his money and extend the note. He was, as I said, *close to Dad Skinner*—a pretended friend. And who but a close friend would Dad tell that he had all that gold in the safe there on the ranch?"

"Then I decided to look for the Chinaman. But instead of looking, like the posse did, for a live Chinaman, I was looking for a dead one. He must be, I figured, in some inaccessible place. So I went out and studied the sky hereabouts."

"The sky?" demanded Style, small eyes batting.

"Yep. And when I saw the buzzards sailing over Rattlesnake Gorge, and figured there couldn't be any dead horses or cattle down there, I climbed down the cliff, and there the poor fellow was."

"Good cripes, Jingling," said Style, "I never thought of that."

"You're a clever hombre," agreed the sheriff, "but what you going to write in the paper?"

"You'll know when the weekly edition is off the press," answered Jessup severely. "Now, hike—I'm too busy to talk to-day. In fact, I balk at having to talk, because I must write far into the night."

After the officers had gone, Jingling Jessup took a piece of copy paper, inserted it in the blind old typewriter, and began:

Due to the clever work of our excellent sheriff, Mr. Del Lewis, ably assisted by his deputy, Mr. Hank Style, one of the most remarkable murder mysteries in the history of Mesa Grande has been solved.

He glanced over this paragraph quizzically, then muttered aloud:

"I get the nice fat reward, and so I take the cash, and let the credit go."

THE END



NEVER TAKE THINGS FOR GRANTED

A newspaper man, in the due order of events, should always go where he is sent. If he tries to evade the responsibilities of his job something black, like the loss of a job is liable to happen.

There is the true tale, never before related, of the reporter on a sheet in Brooklyn who was sent to attend a concert to be given by Geraldine Farrar. After securing a program at seven thirty the fellow ducked away to a private party, returning to his paper at eleven thirty to write a flowing account of the evening's entertainment. According to his story, Miss Farrar had never been in better voice.

Next morning a short announcement in the *New York Times* told that Miss Farrar's sudden indisposition had been the reason for her nonappearance in Brooklyn.

At ten o'clock a notice appeared on the bulletin board of the Brooklyn newspaper: "The man who attended that Farrar concert had a costly evening. He can consider himself fired!"

Some years ago a star on a prominent New York daily, not connected with the Associated Press, and so not receiving service from the City News, was sent to cover an important event taking place at the old Madison Square Garden.

He went there—for a minute—obtained a program—and then on his merry way. Returning to the office at midnight he wrote a seeming authoritative report of the proceedings.

The following morning the other dailies carried routine accounts, also, with the difference that his was the only one not to mention the interesting fact that a platform collapsed, sending more than a dozen people to the hospital!

To get out of this would require more skill than was ever given to the great Houdini. So the man owned up; and as he was a valuable member of the staff continued to occupy his position.

JOHN WILSTACH.



Below the Dead Line

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

*How Bill and Jim, in a good cause, came to be cornered
like a couple of rats in a trap*

THE policeman standing in the shadow of the big marble-fronted building eyed us appraisingly.

"I don't like the way that cop is looking at us," I whispered uneasily to Bill.

"We're lucky he doesn't shoot us," said Bill reassuringly. "We're below the dead line now; and two suspicious looking characters going through the street at 2.30 A.M. are apt to be killed first and identified later."

"We're not suspicious characters," I protested. "Just a pair of honest drifters looking for a low-priced lodging house."

"I didn't say suspicious characters," replied Bill. "I said suspicious-looking—and any birds perambulating through this part of the city at 2.30 A.M. are considered suspicious-

looking if they aren't wearing brass buttons and swinging a club. There's been so many safe robberies and hold-ups in this section that any cop who drags in a bullet-riddled thug is promoted on the spot and given a medal."

"Where's that lodging house you were telling me about?" I demanded nervously.

"We've got about eight blocks to go," said Bill. "If that guy who gave us a lift hadn't had those two blowouts we'd have been in the bunks four hours ago."

The deserted streets echoed eerily with our footfalls. Not a light peeped from any of the buildings. We had seen only the one policeman. Of possible safe-breakers we had seen none.

"Yes, sir," remarked Bill cheerfully. "The city is offering a thousand dol-

lars' reward for the capture of robbers—a thousand dollars dead or alive—preferably dead."

We rounded a corner and turned down a side street toward the river. I knew it was toward the river because in the distance I could hear the raucous croak of a tugboat.

"We'll soon be there," said Bill encouragingly. "The dead line ends at the next block. This here is the Sixth National Bank."

He pointed to a granite edifice to our right. Bill once worked for a trucking firm and he knew the city like a book.

"There's a light in there," I remarked, pointing to one of the big plate glass windows.

Bill glanced toward it.

"It's over the entrance to the vaults," he said. "I guess they keep it burning all night."

"Well, a bank can afford to do—" I began, but stopped abruptly as Bill clutched my arm.

"Look, Jim!" he ejaculated. "There's somebody under the light."

I looked. Sure enough there was a dark shadow. It appeared to be the shadow of a man stooping over.

"A safe robber!" I gasped. "Where's that cop?"

"The devil with a cop," whispered Bill. "We'll nab this bird and get the reward for ourselves."

The prospect of tackling a safe robber who probably bristled with firearms didn't appeal especially to me, but Bill was not to be discouraged.

"A thousand dollars' reward," he sighed ecstatically.

"Enough to pay our funeral expenses, maybe," I interposed gloomily.

"Keep moving along," Bill whispered eagerly. "We'll see if there's an alley leading to the back of the bank from this side street. No use trying the front door."

We walked fully a hundred feet before we came to a break in the solid wall of granite. It was a dark, narrow passway.

"Probably a lookout is stationed in there somewhere ready to pump us full of bullets," I whispered.

"Come on!" Bill is like a bloodhound once he gets started on a scent.

We glanced up and down the street. Not a soul was in sight. We cautiously slunk into the passway, until we came to a break in the wall. There a narrow door blocked our progress.

Bill stealthily tried the knob.

"It's unlocked," he whispered in elation. "Here's where the robbers entered."

"Let's go back to the street and call a cop," I suggested.

"Nothing doing," insisted Bill doggedly. "This is our thousand and we don't want to divvy it with the police department."

He opened the door and we crept inside. It was blacker than pitch. A tomblike silence enveloped us. For a moment we stood there.

"Let's strike a light," I whispered.

"Don't be a fool," said Bill.

"We're fools, all right," I ventured. "We wouldn't be here if we weren't."

Bill led the way. I kept hold of the edge of his coat so we wouldn't be separated in the darkness.

We appeared to be in a long corridor. There might have been doors opening off from it on either side, but so far as seeing anything was concerned there might as well have been yawning abysses.

Personally, I would just as soon have fallen into a yawning abyss as to keep forging ahead through the darkness in quest of a robber's bullet. I might have turned back, but some one had to be along to look after Bill.

Finally we came to an abrupt stop against a solid wall. The corridor ended here, but apparently branched off at right angles in both directions. From afar off came the muffled sound of a bell tolling.

"Three o'clock," I whispered to Bill.

Bill merely grunted.

"We'll take the turn to our right,"

he whispered finally. "That ought to bring us near the vault."

So to the right we went. In the distance I saw a dim light, the effect being like a square cloud of white smoke in a fog.

As we neared it, I discovered that it came from a window which apparently opened on a courtyard. We looked out.

"What in thunder?" ejaculated Bill.

On the other side of the narrow courtyard was a barred window, beyond which was the big steel vault door of the bank with the light above it.

"We got in the wrong building," groaned Bill. "There must have been another passway farther up the street."

"Well, the robber is still there. He's—"

Bill interrupted with an exclamation of disgust. He had made a discovery simultaneously with me.

The "robber" was nothing but a shadow cast by a piece of canvas or something like that hanging from a projecting bar under the light.

"Ain't that rotten luck?" groaned Bill.

"Let's get out of here," I suggested. "I'd hate like blazes to be caught prowling around in this place at three o'clock in the morning."

Bill clutched me nervously.

"Did you hear that?" he demanded.

"I heard it," I whispered hoarsely.

In the distance had come the sound of a door being slammed and bolted.

"Somebody is coming," I groaned.

A flickering light came from the entrance to the long corridor. In less than a minute the person with the light would appear around the corner.

There was the sound of a deep base voice humming "Bye, Bye, Blackbird."

"It's the watchman," whispered Bill. "He probably stepped outside for a few minutes—that's how it was we found the door unlocked."

"Wonder if he'll get a thousand for

the two of us or a thousand for each," I ventured speculatively. "Dead or alive," I added solemnly.

"This is no joke," muttered Bill.

"I'll say it isn't," I agreed.

We watched with the fascination of terror as the flickering light grew stronger and stronger. Occasionally it would stop for an instant and there would be the sound of a door opening and closing again. The watchman apparently was a conscientious one in making his tour of inspection.

"If he can open the doors, we can," whispered Bill.

He fumbled hastily about in the darkness, and the next instant I realized that he had opened a door almost at our elbows.

"Come on." He pulled my coat sleeve. I followed him inside. He cautiously closed the door again. "Quick! Got a match?" Bill's brains were beginning to hit on all six cylinders once more. "Maybe we can get a glimpse of the layout here before the watchman shows up. We've got to hide."

Fortunately I had some matches. I struck one and held it above my head. The light flickered and for an instant I was afraid it was going out. Then it took renewed life, and by the dim light we saw that we were in a small room.

It appeared extremely untidy. There was a desk, an easy chair, and some small odds and ends—nothing large enough to serve as places of concealment for two full-grown men like Bill and me.

There was one small window, so high up that one would need a stepladder to reach it. All this we hastily took in. Then the match flickered and again we were in complete darkness.

"It's the watchman's office," I groaned. "It's going to be mighty handy for him to call the coroner after he gets through with us. The telephone was right over there in the cor-

ner near the desk light. Well, good-by, old pal."

I extended my hand and felt for Bill in the darkness.

"Good-by, nothing," retorted Bill. "You leave it to me."

There was the snap of a button, and the light above the desk illuminated the tiny room.

"That's right—make it easier for him to shoot straight," I said. "If he started firing at us in the dark, he might mangle us all up before he killed us. Now he'll be able to take good aim. We're cornered like a couple of rats in a trap."

"If you refer to the same brains that got us into it, we're goners for sure," I remarked sarcastically.

Bill had planked himself down in the chair, and had taken the telephone receiver off the hook. He twiddled the hook up and down impatiently.

"Give me police station," he directed the operator curtly.

"Police station!" I echoed.

I concluded that Bill's mind had given way completely under the stress of our predicament. Didn't we have enough trouble on our hands without dragging in the police?

There was a shuffling noise outside the door.

"Hello, lieutenant!" Bill was shouting into the telephone. "Hello! This the lieutenant?"

The door opened. Framed in the opening was the figure of a husky-looking individual. As he saw Bill and me, his hands whipped like a flash to his belt and came up clutching a wicked-looking automatic. In his other hand was an electric lantern.

"Oh, it's all right, lieutenant. He's here. He just came in." Bill slammed up the receiver.

Mingled surprise and anger were plastered on the countenance of the watchman.

"We're glad to see you, Mr. Watchman," said Bill genially. "Jones and

I happened to be passing and noticed that the door was open. We came in. You were not anywhere around and we were afraid you had met with foul play. Just called the station to ask the lieutenant for instructions as you were walking in the door."

The watchman sheepishly slipped his automatic back into his belt, and placed his lantern on the desk.

"I just stepped out to speak to Williams over at the bank. I wasn't gone for more than two minutes," he said apologetically.

"You hadn't ought to leave the premises at all," said Bill severely. "Come on, Jim, we've got to get along."

Bill rose to his feet and headed for the door.

"Just a minute, please!" The watchman rummaged through the odds and ends on his desk and produced a handful of cigars. "Here, divvy these up," he directed. "You won't say any more to anybody about this, will you?" His tone was pleading.

"We won't, if you won't," agreed Bill as he pocketed the cigars.

"I promise you I won't," declared the watchman fervently. He escorted us to the outer door, bid us good night, and we headed down the passway to the street.

"Well, I don't see that thousand we were going to get," I remarked sarcastically.

"What's a mere thousand beside what we actually got out of this?" said Bill disdainfully.

"And what in thunder did we get out of it?" I demanded.

Bill grinned.

"We've got our lives; they're worth a pile—to us; we've got experience, that's priceless; and we've got some good smokes."

Bill bit off the end of one cigar and handed me another.

If optimism was brains, Bill would be a prodigy.

THE END

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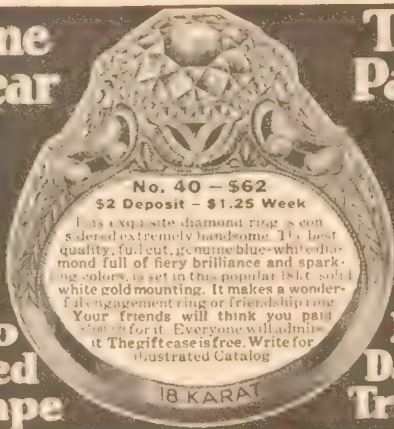
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Banish the misery of Piles

DON'T SUFFER—fearing an operation. Use *Unguentine Pile Cones*. Begin this modern treatment at once. Stop itching, bleeding, soothe the pain. Same healing powers as Unguentine. At your druggist's, 75c. Trial FREE. Write today. The Norwich Pharmacal Co., Norwich, N.Y.



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18 inches wide, 80 inches long

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I make myself hear, after being deaf for 25 years, with these Artificial Ear Drums. I wear them day and night. They stop head noises and ringing ears. They are perfectly comfortable. No one sees them. Write me and I will tell you a true story how I got deaf and how I make you hear. Address



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GENUINE BROADCLOTH SHIRT

Never mind the picture. Listen . . .

Radiant and lustrous with a silky surface you can't wash out.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE to fit, wear and wash.

White glistening broadcloths—Tailored with care; cut large yet shapely; smart attached collar with pocket, or pre-shrunk neck band style; pearly buttons; coat style. If your dealer hasn't Lustray, send us \$2 (check or money order) for this wonderful shirt value.

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Dept. N-5, 329 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

FREE: Send for Lustray miniature "Test Box" containing samples of other grades of Lustray broadcloths at \$3 (Green Label) and \$4 (Blue Label).



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STEADY WORK
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Gentlemen: Rush to me, FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government big pay positions now obtainable. Send me FREE 32-page book describing salaries, hours, work, vacation and giving full particulars on how to get a position.

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White Teeth are not enough BECAUSE...



4 out of 5 pay Pyorrhea

Too many people, thinking they are safe when teeth are white, suddenly find themselves victims of Pyorrhea. This foe ignores the teeth and attacks the gums. It takes high toll in health from 4 persons out of 5 after forty and thousands younger.

Don't fear these odds. See your dentist at least once every six months and start using Forhan's for the Gums today.

This dentifrice cleans teeth snowy white and protects them against acids which cause decay.

Also, if used regularly and in time, it helps to firm gums and keep them healthy. Pyorrhea seldom attacks healthy gums.

Make Forhan's the daily morning and night health habit. Get a tube from your druggist, today . . . 35c and 60c.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.

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are probably the best and
most favorably known
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WHY NOT OWN A 21 JEWEL SANTA FE SPECIAL WATCH?

You will never miss the few cents a day that will make you own one of these watches—SEND FOR WATCH BOOK—illustrating in beautiful colors hundreds of designs and combinations in cases in the POCKET WATCH, MEN'S STRAP WATCH and LADIES' WRIST WATCH. You can have your name or monogram and any emblem you may desire engraved in the Case to suit your own ideas. Write today for Free Watch Book, and make your selection at once, while this offer lasts.

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Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

Office heat... chilly street... sore throat!

From over-heated offices into chilly streets . . . out in the cold waiting for transportation . . . into germ laden cars crowded with coughers . . . is it any wonder thousands are laid up with colds or sore throats—or worse?

Don't be one of them. After exposure of this kind, gargle with Listerine when you get home.

Better yet, use it systematically night and morning during nasty weather. It may be the means of sparing you a long, painful and costly siege of illness. Many a cold weather complaint has been checked by Listerine before it had a chance to become serious.

Being antiseptic, it immediately attacks the countless

disease-producing germs that lodge in mouth, nose and throat.

Again, we counsel you for your own protection to use this safe antiseptic twice a day, at least, during inclement weather. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

**Gargle when
you get home**



**More than
50 diseases**
have their beginning or development in the THROAT and nose. Some of mild character, yield to an antiseptic. Others, more serious, do not. At the first sign of an irritated throat, gargle frequently with Listerine, and if no improvement is shown, consult a physician.

ITS NAME ALONE.
The name Listerine Tooth Paste is a guarantee that it is the best paste that scientific knowledge could achieve.
Large tube—25c

LISTERINE

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